OF
Dramatick Poesie,
AN
ESSAY.

By JOHN DRYDEN Esq;

——*Fungar vice cotis, acutum*
Reddere quæ ferrum valet, exors ipsa secandi.

Horat. De Arte Poet.

LONDON,

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To the Right Honourable

CHARLES LORD BUCKHURST.

My Lord,

S I was lately reviewing my looſe Papers, amongſt the reſt I found this Eſſay, the writing of which in this rude and indigeſted manner wherein your Lordſhip now ſees it, ſerv'd as an amuſement to me in the Country, when the violence of the laſt Plague had driven me from the Town. Seeing then our Theaters ſhut up, I was engag'd in theſe kind of thoughts with the ſame delight with which men think upon their abſent Miſtreſſes: I confeſs I find many things in this diſcourſe which I do not now approve, my judgment being a little alter'd ſince the writing of it, but whither for the better or the worſe I know not: Neither indeed is it much material in an Eſſay, where all I have ſaid is problematical. For the way of writing Playes in verſe, which I have ſeem'd to favour, I have ſince that time laid the Practice of it aſide, till I have more leiſure, becauſe I find it troubleſome and ſlow. But I am no way alter'd from my opinion of it, at leaſt with any reaſons which

have oppos'd it. For your Lordſhip may eaſily obſerve that none are very violent againſt it, but thoſe who either have not attempted it, or who have ſucceeded ill in their attempt. 'Tis enough for me to have your Lordſhips example for my excuſe in that little which I have done in it; and I am ſure my Adverſaries can bring no ſuch Arguments againſt Verſe, as the fourth Act of Pompey *will furniſh me with, in its defence. Yet, my Lord, you muſt ſuffer me a little to complain of you, that you too ſoon withdraw from us a contentment, of which we expected the continuance, becauſe you gave it us ſo early. 'Tis a revolt without occaſion from your Party, where your merits had already rais'd you to the higheſt commands, and where you have not the excuſe of other men that you have been ill us'd, and therefore laid down Armes. I know no other quarrel you can have to Verſe, then that which* Spurina *had to his beauty, when he tore and mangled the features of his Face, onely becauſe they pleas'd too well the lookers on. It was an honour which ſeem'd to wait for you, to lead out a new Colony of Writers from the Mother Nation: and upon the firſt ſpreading of your Enſignes there had been many in a readineſs to have follow'd ſo fortunate a Leader; if not all, yet the better part of Writers.*

Pars, indocili melior grege; mollis & expes
Inominata perprimat cubilia.

I am almoſt of opinion, that we ſhould force you to accept of the command,

command, as ſometimes the Prætorian *Bands have compell'd their Captains to receive the Empire. The Court, which is the beſt and ſureſt judge of writing, has generally allow'd of Verſe's, and in the Town it has found favourers of Wit and Quality. As for your own particular, My Lord, you have yet youth, and time enough to give part of it to the divertiſement of the Publick, before you enter into the ſerious and more unpleaſant buſineſs of the world. That which the French Poet ſaid of the Temple of Love, may be as well apply'd to the Temple of the Muſes. The words, as near as I can remember them, were theſe:*

La jeuneſſe a mauvaiſe grace,
N'ayant pas adoré dans le temple d'Amour:
Il faut qu'il entre, & pour le ſage
Si ce neſt ſon vray ſejour
Ce'ſt un giſte ſur ſon paſſage.

I leave the words to work their effect upon your Lordſhip in their own Language, becauſe no other can ſo well expreſs the nobleneſs of the thought; And wiſh you may be ſoon call'd to bear a part in the affairs of the Nation, where I know the world expects you, and wonders why you have been ſo long forgotten; there being no perſon amongſt our young Nobility, on whom the eyes of all men are ſo much bent. But in the mean time your Lordſhip may imitate the courſe of Nature, who gives us the flower before the fruit: that I may ſpeak to you in the language of the Muſes, which I have taken from an excellent Poem to the King.

As

As Nature, when ſhe fruit deſignes, thinks fit
By beauteous bloſſoms to proceed to it;
And while ſhe does accompliſh all the Spring,
Birds to her ſecret operations ſing.

I confeſs I have no greater reaſon, in addreſſing this Eſſay to your Lordſhip, then that it might awaken in you the deſire of writing ſomething, in whatever kind it be, which might be an honour to our Age and Country. And me thinks it might have the ſame effect upon you, which Homer *tells us the fight of the Greeks and Trojans before the Fleet, had on the ſpirit of* Achilles, *who though he had reſolved not to ingage, yet found a martial warmth to ſteal upon him, at the ſight of Blows, the ſound of Trumpets, and the cries of fighting Men. For my own part, if in treating of this ſubject I ſometimes diſſent from the opinion of better Wits, I declare it is not ſo much to combat their opinions, as to defend my own, which were firſt made publick. Sometimes, like a Schollar in a Fencing-School I put forth my ſelf, and ſhow my own ill play, on purpoſe to be better taught. Sometimes I ſtand deſperately to my Armes, like the Foot when deſerted by their Horſe, not in hope to overcome, but onely to yield on more honourable termes. And yet, my Lord, this war of opinions, you well know, has fallen out among the Writers of all Ages, and ſometimes betwixt Friends. Onely it has been proſecuted by ſome, like Pedants, with violence of words, and manag'd by others like Gentlemen,*

Gentlemen, with candour and civility. Even Tully *had a Controverſie with his dear* Atticus; *and in one of his Dialogues makes him ſuſtain the part of an Enemy in Philoſophy, who in his Letters is his confident of State, and made privy to the moſt weighty affairs of the Roman Senate. And the ſame reſpect which was paid by* Tully *to* Atticus, *we find return'd to him afterwards by* Cæſar *on a like occaſion, who anſwering his Book in praiſe of* Cato, *made it not ſo much his buſineſs to condemn* Cato, *as to praiſe* Cicero. *But that I may decline ſome part of the encounter with my Adverſaries, whom I am neither willing to combate, nor well able to reſiſt; I will give your Lordſhip the Relation of a Diſpute betwixt ſome of our Wits upon this ſubject, in which they did not onely ſpeak of Playes in Verſe, but mingled, in the freedom of Diſcourſe, ſome things of the Ancient, many of the Modern wayes of writing, comparing thoſe with theſe, and the Wits of our Nation with thoſe of others: 'tis true they differ'd in their opinions, as 'tis probable they would: neither do I take upon me to reconcile, but to relate them: and that as* Tacitus *profeſſes of himſelf,* Sine ſtudio partium aut ira: *without Paſſion or Intereſt; leaving your Lordſhip to decide it in favour of which part you ſhall judge moſt reaſonable, and withall, to pardon the many errours of,*

Your Lordſhips moſt obedient humble Servant,

JOHN DRYDEN.

TO

TO THE

READER.

THE drift of the ensuing Discourse was chiefly to vindicate the honour of our English Writers, from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French before them. This I intimate, least any should think me so exceeding vain, as to teach others an Art which they understand much better then my self. But if this incorrect Essay, written in the Country without the help of Books, or advice of Friends, shall find any acceptance in the world, I promise to my self a better success of the second part, wherein the Vertues and Faults of the English Poets, who have written either in this, the Epique, or the Lyrique way, will be more fully treated of, and their several styles impartially imitated.

AN

AN

ESSAY

OF

Dramatick Poesie.

IT was that memorable day, in the first Summer of the late War, when our Navy ingag'd the Dutch: a day wherein the two most mighty and best appointed Fleets which any age had ever seen, disputed the command of the greater half of the Globe, the commerce of Nations, and the riches of the Universe. While these vast floating bodies, on either side, mov'd against each other in parallel lines, and our Country men, under the happy conduct of his Royal Highness, went breaking, by little and little, into the line of the Enemies; the noise of the Cannon from both Navies reach'd our ears about the City: so that all men, being alarm'd with it, and in a dreadful suspence of the event, which we knew was then deciding, every one went following the sound as his fancy led him; and leaving the Town almost empty, some took towards the

Park, some cross the River, others down it; all seeking the noise in the depth of silence.

Amongst the rest, it was the fortune of *Eugenius*, *Crites*, *Lisideius* and *Neander*, to be in company together: three of them persons whom their witt and Quality have made known to all the Town: and whom I have chose to hide under these borrowed names, that they may not suffer by so ill a relation as I am going to make of their discourse.

Taking then a Barge which a servant of *Lisideius* had provided for them, they made haste to shoot the Bridge, and left behind them that great fall of waters which hindred them from hearing what they desired: after which, having disingag'd themselves from many Vessels which rode at Anchor in the *Thames*, and almost blockt up the passage towards *Greenwich*, they order'd the Watermen to row with their Oares more gently; and then every one favouring his own curiosity with a strict silence, it was not long ere they perceiv'd the Air break about them like the noise of distant Thunder, or of Swallows in a Chimney: those little undulations of sound, though almost vanishing before they reach'd them, yet still seeming to retain somewhat of their first horrour which they had betwixt the Fleets: after they had attentively listned till such time as the sound by little and little went from them, *Eugenius* lifting up his head, and taking notice of it, was the first who congratulated to the rest that happy Omen of our Nations Victory: adding, we had but this to desire in confirmation of it, that we might hear no more of that noise which was now leaving the English Coast. When the rest had concur'd in the same opinion, *Crites*, a person of a sharp judgment, and somewhat too delicate a taste in wit, which the world have mistaken in him for ill nature, said, smiling to us, that if the contentment of this battel had not been so exceeding great, he could scarce have wish'd the Victory at the price he knew must pay for it, in being subject to the reading and

hearing of so many ill verses as he was sure would be made upon it; adding, that no Argument could scape some of those eternal Rhimers, who watch a Battel with more diligence then the Ravens and birds of Prey; and the worst of them surest to be first in upon the quarry, while the better able, either out of modesty writ not at all, or set that due value upon their Poems, as to let them be often cal'd for and long expected! there are some of those impertinent people you speak of, answer'd *Lisideius*, who to my knowledg, are already so provided, either way, that they can produce not onely a Panegirick upon the Victory, but, if need be, a funeral elegy upon the Duke: and after they have crown'd his valour with many Lawrels, at last deplore the odds under which he fell; concluding that his courage deserv'd a better destiny. All the company smil'd at the conceipt of *Lisideius*; but *Crites*, more eager then before, began to make particular exceptions against some Writers, and said the publick Magistrate ought to send betimes to forbid them; and that it concern'd the peace and quiet of all honest people, that ill Poets should be as well silenc'd as seditious Preachers. In my opinion, replyed *Eugenius*, you pursue your point too far; for as to my own particular, I am so great a lover of Poesie, that I could wish them all rewarded who attempt but to do well; at least I would not have them worse us'd then *Sylla* the Dictator did one of their brethren heretofore: *Quem in concione vidimus* (says *Tully* speaking of him) *cum ei libellum malus poeta de populo subjecisset, quod epigramma in eum fecisset tantummodo alternis versibus longiusculis, statim ex iis rebus quæ tunc vendebat jubere ei præmium tribui, sub ea conditione ne quid posthac scriberet.* I could wish with all my heart, replied *Crites*, that many whom we know were as bountifully thank'd upon the same condition, that they would never trouble us again. For amongst others, I have a mortal apprehension of two Poets, whom this victory with the help of both her wings will never be able

to escape; 'tis easie to guess whom you intend, said *Lisideius*; and without naming them, I ask you if one of them does not perpetually pay us with clenches upon words and a certain clownish kind of raillery? if now and then he does not offer at a Catachresis or Clevelandism; wresting and torturing a word into another meaning: In fine, if he be not one of those whom the French would call *un mauvais buffon*; one that is so much a well-willer to the Satire, that he spares no man; and though he cannot strike a blow to hurt any, yet ought to be punish'd for the malice of the action; as our Witches are justly hang'd because they think themselves so; and suffer deservedly for believing they did mischief, because they meant it. You have described him, said *Crites*, so exactly, that I am affraid to come after you with my other extremity of Poetry: He is one of those who having had some advantage of education and converse, knows better then the other what a Poet should be, but puts it into practice more unluckily then any man; his stile and matter are every where alike; he is the most calm, peaceable Writer you ever read: he never disquiets your passions with the least concernment, but still leaves you in as even a temper as he found you; he is a very Leveller in Poetry, he creeps along with ten little words in every line, and helps out his Numbers with *For to*, and *Unto*, and all the pretty Expletives he can find, till he drags them to the end of another line; while the Sense is left tir'd half way behind it: he doubly starves all his Verses, first for want of thought, and then of expression; his Poetry neither has wit in it, nor seems to have it; like him in *Martiall*:

Pauper videri Cinna vult, & est pauper:

He affects plainness, to cover his want of imagination: when he writes the serious way, the highest flight of his fancy is some miserable *Antithesis*,

theſis, or ſeeming contradiction; and in the Comick he is ſtill reaching at ſome thin conceit, the ghoſt of a Jeſt, and that too flies before him, never to be caught; theſe Swallows which we ſee before us on the *Thames*, are the juſt reſemblance of his wit: you may obſerve how near the water they ſtoop, how many proffers they make to dip, and yet how ſeldome they touch it: and when they do, 'tis but the ſurface: they skim over it but to catch a gnat, and then mount into the ayr and leave it. Well Gentlemen, ſaid *Eugenius*, you may ſpeak your pleaſure of theſe Authors; but though I and ſome few more about the Town may give you a peaceable hearing, yet, aſſure your ſelves, there are multitudes who would think you malicious and them injur'd: eſpecially him who you firſt deſcribed; he is the very *Withers* of the City: they have bought more Editions of his Works then would ſerve to lay under all their Pies at the Lord Mayor's *Chriſtmaſs*. When his famous Poem firſt came out in the year 1660, I have ſeen them reading it in the midſt of Change-time; nay ſo vehement they were at it, that they loſt their bargain by the Candles ends: but what will you ſay, if he has been received amongſt the great Ones? I can aſſure you he is, this day, the envy of a great perſon, who is Lord in the Art of Quibbling; and who does not take it well, that any man ſhould intrude ſo far into his Province. All I would wiſh, replied *Crites*, is, that they who love his Writings, may ſtill admire him, and his fellow Poet: *qui Bavium non odit, &c.* is curſe ſufficient. And farther, added *Liſideius*, I believe there is no man who writes well, but would think himſelf very hardly dealt with, if their Admirers ſhould praiſe any thing of his: *Nam quos contemnimus eorum quoque laudes contemnimus.* There are ſo few who write well in this Age, ſaid *Crites*, that me-thinks any praiſes ſhould be wellcome; they neither riſe to the dignity of the laſt Age, nor to any of the Ancients; and we may cry out of the Writers of this time, with more

reaſon

reason than *Petronius* of his, *Pace vestra liceat dixisse, primi omnium eloquentiam perdidistis:* you have debauched the true old Poetry so far, that Nature, which is the soul of it, is not in any of your Writings.

If your quarrel (said *Eugenius*) to those who now write, be grounded onely upon your reverence to Antiquity, there is no man more ready to adore those great Greeks and Romans than I am: but on the other side, I cannot think so contemptibly of the Age I live in, or so dishonourably of my own Countrey, as not to judge we equal the Ancients in most kinds of Poesie, and in some surpass them; neither know I any reason why I may not be as zealous for the Reputation of our Age, as we find the Ancients themselves in reference to those who lived before them. For you hear your *Horace* saying,

Indignor quidquam reprehendi, non quia crassè
Compositum, illepidève putetur, sed quia nuper.

And after,

Si meliora dies, ut vina, poemata reddit,
Scire velim pretium chartis quotus arroget annus?

But I see I am ingaging in a wide dispute, where the arguments are not like to reach close on either side; for Poesie is of so large extent, and so many both of the Ancients and Moderns have done well in all kinds of it, that, in citing one against the other, we shall take up more time this Evening, than each mans occasions will allow him: therefore I would ask *Crites* to what part of Poesie he would confine his Arguments, and whether he would defend the general cause of the Ancients against the Moderns, or oppose any Age of the Moderns against this of ours?

Crites a little while considering upon this Demand, told *Eugenius* he approv'd

approv'd his Propositions, and, if he pleased, he would limit their Dispute to *Dramatique Poesie*; in which he thought it not difficult to prove, either that the Antients were superiour to the Moderns, or the last Age to this of ours.

Eugenius was somewhat surpriz'd, when he heard *Crites* make choice of that Subject; For ought I see, said he, I have undertaken a harder Province than I imagin'd; for though I never judg'd the Plays of the Greek or Roman Poets comparable to ours; yet on the other side those we now see acted, come short of many which were written in the last Age: but my comfort is if we are orecome, it will be onely by our own Countreymen: and if we yield to them in this one part of Poesie, we more surpass them in all the other; for in the Epique or Lyrique way it will be hard for them to show us one such amongst them, as we have many now living, or who lately were so. They can produce nothing so courtly writ, or which expresses so much the Conversation of a Gentleman, as Sir *John Suckling*; nothing so even, sweet, and flowing as Mr. *Waller*; nothing so Majestique, so correct as Sir *John Denham*; nothing so elevated, so copious, and full of spirit, as Mr *Cowley*; as for the Italian, French, and Spanish Plays, I can make it evident, that those who now write, surpass them; and that the *Drama* is wholly ours.

All of them were thus far of *Eugenius* his opinion, that the sweetness of English Verse was never understood or practis'd by our Fathers; even *Crites* himself did not much oppose it: and every one was willing to acknowledge how much our Poesie is improv'd, by the happiness of some Writers yet living; who first taught us to mould our thoughts into easie and significant words; to retrench the superfluities of expression, and to make our Rime so properly a part of the Verse, that it should never mis-lead the sence, but it self be led and govern'd by it.

Eugenius

Eugenius was going to continue this Discourse, when *Lisideius* told him it was necessary, before they proceeded further, to take a standing measure of their Controversie; for how was it possible to be decided who writ the best Plays, before we know what a Play should be? but, this once agreed on by both Parties, each might have recourse to it, either to prove his own advantages, or discover the failings of his Adversary.

He had no sooner said this, but all desir'd the favour of him to give the definition of a Play; and they were the more importunate, because neither *Aristotle*, nor *Horace*, nor any other, who writ of that Subject, had ever done it.

Lisideius, after some modest denials, at last confess'd he had a rude Notion of it; indeed rather a Description then a Definition: but which serv'd to guide him in his private thoughts, when he was to make a judgment of what others writ: that he conceiv'd a Play ought to be, *A just and lively Image of Humane Nature, representing its Passions and Humours, and the Changes of Fortune to which it is subject; for the Delight and Instruction of Mankind.*

This Definition, though *Crites* rais'd a Logical Objection against it; that it was onely *a genere & fine*, and so not altogether perfect; was yet well received by the rest: and after they had given order to the Water-men to turn their Barge, and row softly, that they might take the cool of the Evening in their return; *Crites*, being desired by the Company to begin, spoke on behalf of the Ancients, in this manner:

If Confidence presage a Victory, *Eugenius*, in his own opinion, has already triumphed over the Ancients; nothing seems more easie to him, than to overcome those whom it is our greatest praise to have imitated well: for we do not onely build upon their foundation; but by their modells. *Dramatique Poesie* had time enough, reckoning from *Thespis* (who first invented it) to

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Ariſtophanes, to be born, to grow up, and to flouriſh in Maturity. It has been obſerved of Arts and Sciences, that in one and the ſame Century they have arriv'd to a great perfection; and no wonder, ſince every Age has a kind of Univerſal Genius, which inclines thoſe that live in it to ſome particular Studies: the Work then being puſh'd on by many hands, muſt of neceſſity go forward.

Is it not evident, in theſe laſt hundred years (when the Study of Philoſophy has been the buſineſs of all the *Virtuoſi* in *Chriſtendome*) that almoſt a new Nature has been reveal'd to us? that more errours of the School have been detected, more uſeful Experiments in Philoſophy have been made; more Noble Secrets in Opticks, Medicine, Anatomy, Aſtronomy, diſcover'd, than in all thoſe credulous and doting Ages from *Ariſtotle* to us? ſo true it is that nothing ſpreads more faſt than Science, when rightly and generally cultivated.

Add to this the more than common emulation that was in thoſe times of writing well; which though it be found in all Ages and all Perſons that pretend to the ſame Reputation; yet Poeſie being then in more eſteem than now it is, had greater Honours decreed to the Profeſſors of it; and conſequently the Rivalſhip was more high between them; they had Judges ordain'd to decide their Merit, and Prizes to reward it: and Hiſtorians have been diligent to record of *Eſchylus*, *Euripides*, *Sophocles*, *Lycophron*, and the reſt of them, both who they were that vanquiſh'd in theſe Wars of the Theater, and howoften they were crown'd: while the Aſian Kings, and Grecian Common-wealths ſcarce afforded them a Nobler Subject then the unmanly Luxuries of a Debauch'd Court, or giddy Intrigues of a Factious City. *Alit æmulatio ingenia* (ſays *Paterculus*) *& nunc invidia, nunc admiratio incitationem accendit*: Emulation is the Spur of Wit, and ſometimes Envy, ſometimes Admiration quickens our Endeavours.

But now since the Rewards of Honour are taken away, that Vertuous Emulation is turn'd into direct Malice; yet so slothful, that it contents it self to condemn and cry down others, without attempting to do better: 'Tis a Reputation too unprofitable, to take the necessary pains for it; yet wishing they had it, is incitement enough to hinder others from it. And this, in short, *Eugenius*, is the reason, why you have now so few good Poets, and so many severe Judges: Certainly, to imitate the Antients well, much labour and long study is required: which pains, I have already shown, our Poets would want incouragement to take, if yet they had ability to go through with it. Those Ancients have been faithful Imitators and wise Observers of that Nature which is so torn and ill represented in our Plays, they have handed down to us a perfect resemblance of her; which we, like ill Copyers, neglecting to look on, have rendred monstrous and disfigur'd. But, that you may know how much you are indebted to those your Masters, and be ashamed to have so ill requited them: I must remember you that all the Rules by which we practise the *Drama* at this day, either such as relate to the justness and symmetry of the Plot; or the Episodical Ornaments, such as Descriptions, Narrations, and other Beauties, which are not essential to the Play; were delivered to us from the Observations that *Aristotle* made, of those Poets, which either liv'd before him, or were his Contemporaries: we have added nothing of our own, except we have the confidence to say our wit is better; which none boast of in our Age, but such as understand not theirs. Of that Book which *Aristotle* has left us περὶ τῆς Ποιητικῆς, *Horace* his Art of Poetry is an excellent Comment, and, I believe, restores to us that Second Book of his concerning Comedy, which is wanting in him.

Out of these two has been extracted the Famous Rules which the French call, *Des Trois Unitez*, or, The Three Unities, which ought

to

to be obſerv'd in every Regular Play; namely, of Time, Place, and Action.

The unity of Time they comprehend in 24 hours, the compaſs of a Natural Day; or as near it as can be contriv'd: and the reaſon of it is obvious to every one, that the time of the feigned action, or fable of the Play, ſhould be proportion'd as near as can be to the duration of that time in which it is repreſented; ſince therefore all Playes are acted on the Theater in a ſpace of time much within the compaſs of 24 hours, that Play is to be thought the neareſt imitation of Nature, whoſe Plot or Action is confin'd within that time; and, by the ſame Rule which concludes this general proportion of time, it follows, that all the parts of it are to be equally ſubdivided; as namely, that one act take not up the ſuppos'd time of half a day; which is out of proportion to the reſt: ſince the other four are then to be ſtraightned within the compaſs of the remaining half; for it is unnatural that one Act, which being ſpoke or written, is not longer than the reſt, ſhould be ſuppos'd longer by the Audience; 'tis therefore the Poets duty, to take care that no Act ſhould be imagin'd to exceed the time in which it is repreſented on the Stage; and that the intervalls and inequalities of time be ſuppos'd to fall out between the Acts.

This Rule of Time how well it has been obſerv'd by the Antients, moſt of their Playes will witneſs; you ſee them in their Tragedies (wherein to follow this Rule, is certainly moſt difficult) from the very beginning of their Playes, falling cloſe into that part of the Story which they intend for the action or principal object of it; leaving the former part, to be delivered by Narration: ſo that they ſet the Audience, as it were, at the Poſt where the Race is to be concluded: and, ſaving them the tedious expectation of ſeeing the Poet ſet out and ride the beginning of

the Course) you behold him not, till he is in sight of the Goal, and just upon you.

For the Second Unity, which is that of place, the Antients meant by it, That the Scene ought to be continu'd through the Play, in the same place where it was laid in the beginning: for the Stage, on which it is represented, being but one and the same place, it is unnatural to conceive it many; and those far distant from one another. I will not deny but by the variation of painted Scenes, the fancy (which in these cases will contribute to its own deceit) may sometimes imagine it several places, with some appearance of probability; yet it still carries the greater likelihood of truth, if those places be suppos'd so near each other, as in the same Town or City; which may all be comprehended under the larger Denomination of one place: for a greater distance will bear no proportion to the shortness of time, which is allotted in the acting, to pass from one of them to another; for the Observation of this, next to the Antients, the French are to be most commended. They tie themselves so strictly to the unity of place, that you never see in any of their Plays, a Scene chang'd in the middle of an Act: if the Act begins in a Garden, a Street, or Chamber, 'tis ended in the same place; and that you may know it to be the same, the Stage is so supplied with persons that it is never empty all the time: he that enters the second has business with him who was on before; and before the second quits the Stage, a third appears who has business with him.

This *Corneil* calls *La Liaison des Scenes*, the continuity or joyning of the Scenes; and 'tis a good mark of a well contriv'd Play when all the Persons are known to each other, and every one of them has some affairs with all the rest.

As for the third Unity which is that of Action, the Ancients meant no other by it then what the Logicians do by their *Finis*, the end or scope of

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any action: that which is the firſt in Intention, and laſt in Execution: now the Poet is to aim at one great and compleat action, to the carrying on of which all things in his Play, even the very obſtacles, are to be ſubſervient; and the reaſon of this is as evident as any of the former.

For two Actions equally labour'd and driven on by the Writer, would deſtroy the unity of the Poem; it would be no longer one Play, but two: not but that there may be many actions in a Play, as *Ben. Johnſon* has obſerv'd in his diſcoveries, but they muſt be all ſubſervient to the great one, which our language happily expreſſes in the name of under-plots: ſuch as in *Terences Eunuch* is the difference and reconcilement of *Thais* and *Phædria*, which is not the chief buſineſs of the Play, but promotes the marriage of *Chærea* and *Chremes's* Siſter, principally intended by the Poet. There ought to be but one action, ſayes *Corneile*, that is one compleat action which leaves the mind of the Audience in a full repoſe: But this cannot be brought to paſs but by many other imperfect ones which conduce to it, and hold the Audience in a delightful ſuſpence of what will be.

If by theſe Rules (to omit many other drawn from the Precepts and Practice of the Ancients) we ſhould judge our modern Playes; 'tis probable, that few of them would endure the tryal: that which ſhould be the buſineſs of a day, takes up in ſome of them an age; inſtead of one action they are the Epitomes of a mans life; and for one ſpot of ground (which the Stage ſhould repreſent) we are ſometimes in more Countries then the Map can ſhow us.

But if we will allow the Ancients to have contriv'd well, we muſt acknowledge them to have writ better; queſtionleſs we are depriv'd of a great ſtock of wit in the loſs of *Menander* among the Greek Poets, and of *Cæcilius*, *Affranius* and *Varius*, among the Romans: we may gueſs of *Menanders* Excellency by the Plays of *Terence*, who tranſlated ſome of his, and

and yet wanted so much of him that he was call'd by *C. Cæsar* the Half-*Menander*, and of *Varius*, by the Testimonies of *Horace Martial*, and *Velleius Paterculus*: 'Tis probable that these, could they be recover'd, would decide the controversie; but so long as *Aristophanes* in the old Comedy, and *Plautus* in the new are extant; while the Tragedies of *Euripides*, *Sophocles*, and *Seneca* are to be had, I can never see one of those Plays which are now written, but it encreases my admiration of the Ancients; and yet I must acknowledge further, that to admire them as we ought, we should understand them better then we do. Doubtless many things appear flat to us, whose wit depended upon some custome or story which never came to our knowledge, or perhaps upon some Criticism in their language, which being so long dead, and onely remaining in their Books, 'tis not possible they should make us know it perfectly. To read *Macrobius*, explaining the propriety and elegancy of many words in *Virgil*, which I had before pass'd over without consideration, as common things, is enough to assure me that I ought to think the same of *Terence*, and that in the purity of his style (which *Tully* so much valued that he ever carried his works about him) there is yet left in him great room for admiration, if I knew but where to place it. In the mean time I must desire you to take notice, that the greatest man of the last age (*Ben. Johnson*) was willing to give place to them in all things: He was not onely a professed Imitator of *Horace*, but a learned Plagiary of all the others; you track him every where in their Snow: If *Horace*, *Lucan*, *Petronius Arbiter*, *Seneca*, and *Juvenal*, had their own from him, there are few serious thoughts which are new in him; you will pardon me therefore if I presume he lov'd their fashion when he wore their cloaths. But since I have otherwise a great veneration for him, and you, *Eugenius*, prefer him above all other Poets, I will use no farther argument to you then his example: I will produce Father *Ben.* to you, dress'd in all

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the ornaments and colours of the Ancients, you will need no other guide to our Party if you follow him; and whether you conſider the bad Plays of our Age, or regard the good ones of the laſt, both the beſt and worſt of the Modern Poets will equally inſtruct you to eſteem the Ancients.

Crites had no ſooner left ſpeaking, but *Eugenius* who waited with ſome impatience for it, thus began:

I have obſerv'd in your Speech that the former part of it is convincing as to what the Moderns have profited by the rules of the Ancients, but in the latter you are careful to conceal how much they have excell'd them: we own all the helps we have from them, and want neither veneration nor gratitude while we acknowledge that to overcome them we muſt make uſe of the advantages we have receiv'd from them; but to theſe aſſiſtances we have joyned our own induſtry; for (had we ſate down with a dull imitation of them) we might then have loſt ſomewhat of the old perfection, but never acquir'd any that was new. We draw not therefore after their lines, but thoſe of Nature; and having the life before us, beſides the experience of all they knew, it is no wonder if we hit ſome airs and features which they have miſs'd; I deny not what you urge of Arts and Sciences, that they have flouriſh'd in ſome ages more then others; but your inſtance in Philoſophy makes for me: for if Natural Cauſes be more known now then in the time of *Ariſtotle*, becauſe more ſtudied, it follows that Poeſie and other Arts may with the ſame pains arrive ſtill neerer to perfection, and, that granted, it will reſt for you to prove that they wrought more perfect images of humane life then we; which, ſeeing in your Diſcourſe you have avoided to make good, it ſhall now be my task to ſhow you ſome part of their defects, and ſome few Excellencies of the Moderns; and I think there is none among us can imagine I do it enviouſly, or with purpoſe to detract from them; for what intereſt of Fame or Profit can the living loſe by the reputation of the dead?

dead? on the other side, it is a great truth which *Velleius Paterculus* affirms, *Audita visis libentius laudamus; & præsentia invidia, præterita admiratione prosequimur; & his nos obrui, illis instrui credimus*: That praise or censure is certainly the most sincere which unbrib'd posterity shall give us.

Be pleased then in the first place to take notice, that the Greek Poesie, which *Crites* has affirm'd to have arriv'd to perfection in the Reign of the old Comedy, was so far from it, that the distinction of it into Acts was not known to them; or if it were, it is yet so darkly deliver'd to us that we cannot make it out.

All we know of it is from the singing of their Chorus, and that too is so uncertain that in some of their Playes we have reason to conjecture they sung more then five times: *Aristotle* indeed divides the integral parts of a Play into four: First, The *Protasis* or entrance, which gives light onely to the Characters of the persons, and proceeds very little into any part of the action: 2ly, The *Epitasis*, or working up of the Plot where the Play grows warmer: the design or action of it is drawing on, and you see something promising that it will come to pass: Thirdly, the *Catastasis*, or Counterturn, which destroys that expectation, imbroyles the action in new difficulties, and leaves you far distant from that hope in which it found you, as you may have observ'd in a violent stream resisted by a narrow passage; it runs round to an eddy, and carries back the waters with more swiftness then it brought them on: Lastly, the *Catastrophe*, which the Grecians call'd *Λύσις*, the French *le denouement*, and we the discovery or unravelling of the Plot: there you see all things setling again upon their first foundations, and the obstacles which hindred the design or action of the Play once remov'd, it ends with that resemblance of truth and nature, that the audience are satisfied with the conduct of it. Thus this great man deliver'd to us the image of a Play, and I must confess it is so lively that from thence much light

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has been deriv'd to the forming it more perfectly into Acts and Scenes; but what Poet first limited to five the number of the Acts I know not; onely we see it so firmly establish'd in the time of *Horace*, that he gives it for a rule in Comedy; *Neu brevior quinto, neu sit productior actu:* So that you see the Grecians cannot be said to have consummated this Art; writing rather by Entrances then by Acts, and having rather a general indigested notion of a Play, then knowing how and where to bestow the particular graces of it.

But since the Spaniards at this day allow but three Acts, which they call *Jornadas*, to a Play; and the Italians in many of theirs follow them, when I condemn the Antients, I declare it is not altogether because they have not five Acts to every Play, but because they have not confin'd themselves to one certain number; 'tis building an House without a Modell: and when they succeeded in such undertakings, they ought to have sacrific'd to Fortune, not to the Muses.

Next, for the Plot, which *Aristotle* call'd τὸ μυθος and often τῶν πραγμάτων σύστασις, and from him the Romans *Fabula*, it has already been judiciously observ'd by a late Writer, that in their Tragedies it was onely some Tale deriv'd from *Thebes* or *Troy*, or at least some thing that happen'd in those two Ages; which was worn so thred bare by the Pens of all the Epique Poets, and even by Tradition it self of the Talkative Greeklings (as *Ben Johnson* calls them) that before it came upon the Stage, it was already known to all the Audience: and the people so soon as ever they heard the Name of *Oedipus*, knew as well as the Poet, that he had kill'd his Father by a mistake, and committed Incest with his Mother, before the Play; that they were now to hear of a great Plague, an Oracle, and the Ghost of *Laius*: so that they sate with a yawning kind of expectation, till he was to come with his eyes pull'd out, and speak a hundred or two

of Verſes in a Tragick tone, in complaint of his misfortunes. But one *Oedipus*, *Hercules*, or *Medea*, had been tollerable; poor people they ſcap'd not ſo good cheap: they had ſtill the *Chapon Bouillé* ſet before them, till their appetites were cloy'd with the ſame diſh, and the Novelty being gone, the pleaſure vaniſh'd: ſo that one main end of *Dramatique Poeſie* in its Definition, which was to cauſe Delight, was of conſequence deſtroy'd.

In their Comedies, the Romans generally borrow'd their Plots from the Greek Poets; and theirs was commonly a little Girle ſtollen or wandred from her Parents, brought back unknown to the ſame City, there got with child by ſome lewd young fellow; who, by the help of his ſervant, cheats his father, and when her time comes, to cry *Juno Lucina fer opem*; one or other ſees a little Box or Cabinet which was carried away with her, and ſo diſcovers her to her friends, if ſome God do not prevent it, by coming down in a Machine, and take the thanks of it to himſelf.

By the Plot you may gueſs much of the Characters of the Perſons. An Old Father that would willingly before he dies, ſee his Son well married; his Debauch'd Son, kind in his Nature to his Wench, but miſerably in want of Money; a Servant or Slave, who has ſo much wit to ſtrike in with him, and help to dupe his Father, a Braggadochio Captain, a Paraſite, and a Lady of Pleaſure.

As for the poor honeſt Maid, whom all the Story is built upon, and who ought to be one of the principal Actors in the Play, ſhe is commonly a Mute in it: She has the breeding of the Old *Elizabeth* way, for Maids to be ſeen and not to be heard; and it is enough you know ſhe is willing to be married, when the Fifth Act requires it.

Theſe are Plots built after the Italian Mode of Houſes, you ſee thorow them all at once; the Characters are indeed the Imitations of Nature

Nature; but ſo narrow as if they had imitated onely an Eye or an Hand, and did not dare to venture on the lines of a Face, or the Proportion of a Body.

But in how ſtraight a compaſs ſoever they have bounded their Plots and Characters, we will paſs it by, if they have regularly purſued them, and perfectly obſerv'd thoſe three Unities of Time, Place, and Action: the knowledge of which you ſay is deriv'd to us from them. But in the firſt place give me leave to tell you, that the Unity of Place, however it might be practiſed by them, was never any of their Rules: We neither find it in *Ariſtotle*, *Horace*, or any who have written of it, till in our age the French Poets firſt made it a Precept of the Stage. The unity of time, even *Terence* himſelf (who was the beſt and moſt regular of them) has neglected: His *Heautontimorumenos* or Self-Puniſher takes up viſibly two dayes; therefore, ſayes *Scaliger*, the two firſt Acts concluding the firſt day, were acted over-night; the three laſt on the enſuing day: and *Euripides*, in tying himſelf to one day, has committed an abſurdity never to be forgiven him: for in one of his Tragedies he has made *Theſeus* go from *Athens* to *Thebes*, which was about 40 Engliſh miles, under the walls of it to give battel, and appear victorious in the next Act; and yet from the time of his departure to the return of the *Nuntius*, who gives the relation of his Victory, *Æthra* and the Chorus have but 36 Verſes; that is not for every Mile a Verſe.

The like errour is as evident in *Terence* his Eunuch, when *Laches*, the old man, enters in a miſtake the houſe of *Thais*, where betwixt his Exit and the entrance of *Pythias*, who comes to give an ample relation of the Garboyles he has rais'd within, *Parmeno* who was left upon the Stage, has not above five lines to ſpeak: *C'eſt bien employé un temps ſi court*, ſayes the French Poet, who furniſh'd me with one of the obſervations; And

almoſt all their Tragedies will afford us examples of the like nature.

'Tis true, they have kept the continuity, or as you call'd it, *Liaiſon des Scenes* ſomewhat better: two do not perpetually come in together, talk, and go out together; and other two ſucceed them, and do the ſame throughout the Act, which the Engliſh call by the name of ſingle Scenes; but the reaſon is, becauſe they have ſeldom above two or three Scenes, properly ſo call'd, in every act; for it is to be accounted a new Scene, not every time the Stage is empty, but every perſon who enters, though to others, makes it ſo; becauſe he introduces a new buſineſs: Now the Plots of their Plays being narrow, and the perſons few, one of their Acts was written in a leſs compaſs then one of our well wrought Scenes, and yet they are often deficient even in this: To go no further then *Terence*, you find in the Eunuch *Antipho* entring ſingle in the midſt of the third Act, after *Chremes* and *Pythias* were gone off: In the ſame Play you have likewiſe *Dorias* beginning the fourth Act alone; and after ſhe has made a relation of what was done at the Souldiers entertainment (which by the way was very inartificial to do, becauſe ſhe was preſum'd to ſpeak directly to the Audience, and to acquaint them with what was neceſſary to be known, but yet ſhould have been ſo contriv'd by the Poet as to have been told by perſons of the *Drama* to one another, and ſo by them to have come to the knowledge of the people) ſhe quits the Stage, and *Phædria* enters next, alone likewiſe: He alſo gives you an account of himſelf, and of his returning from the Country in *Monologue*, to which unnatural way of narration *Terence* is ſubject in all his playes: In his *Adelphi* or Brothers, *Syrus* and *Demea* enter; after the Scene was broken by the departure of *Soſtrata*, *Geta* and *Canthara*; and indeed you can ſcarce look into any of his Comedies, where you will not preſently diſcover the ſame interruption.

But as they have fail'd both in laying of their Plots, and managing of them,

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swerving from the Rules of their own Art, by misrepresenting Nature to us, in which they have ill satisfied one intention of a Play, which was delight, so in the instructive part they have errd worse: instead of punishing Vice and rewarding Vertue, they have often shown a Prosperous Wickedness, and an Unhappy Piety: They have set before us a bloudy image of revenge in *Medea*, and given her Dragons to convey her safe from punishment. A *Priam* and *Astyanax* murder'd, and *Cassandra* ravish'd, and the lust and murder ending in the victory of him that acted them: In short, there is no indecorum in any of our modern Playes, which if I would excuse, I could not shaddow with some Authority from the Ancients.

And one farther note of them let me leave you: Tragedies and Comedies were not writ then as they are now, promiscuously, by the same person; but he who found his genius bending to the one, never attempted the other way. This is so plain, that I need not instance to you, that *Aristophanes*, *Plautus*, *Terence*, never any of them writ a Tragedy; *Æschylus*, *Eurypides*, *Sophocles* and *Seneca*, never medled with Comedy; the Sock and Buskin were not worn by the same Poet: having then so much care to excel in one kind, very little is to be pardon'd them if they miscarried in it; and this would lead me to the consideration of their wit, had not *Crites* given me sufficient warning not to be too bold in my judgment of it; because the languages being dead, and many of the Customes and little accidents on which it depended, lost to us, we are not competent judges of it. But though I grant that here and there we may miss the application of a Proverb or a Custom, yet a thing well said will be wit in all Languages; and though it may lose something in the Translation, yet, to him who reads it in the Original, 'tis still the same; He has an Idea of its excellency, though it cannot pass from his mind into any other expression or words then those in which he finds it. When *Phar-*

dria—

dria—in the Eunuch had a command from his Miſtreſs to be abſent two dayes; and encouraging himſelf to go through with it, ſaid; *Tandem ego non illa carebam ſi opus ſit, vel totum triduum? Parmeno* to mock the ſoftneſs of his Maſter, lifting up his hands and eyes, cryes out as it were in admiration; *Hui! univerſum triduum!* the elegancy of which *univerſum*, though it cannot be rendred in our language, yet leaves an impreſſion of the wit upon our ſouls: but this happens ſeldom in him, in *Plautus* oftner; who is infinitely too bold in his Metaphors and coyning words, out of which many times his wit is nothing, which queſtionleſs was one reaſon why *Horace* falls upon him ſo ſeverely in thoſe Verſes:

Sed Proavi noſtri Plautinos & numeros, &
Laudavere ſales, nimium patienter utrumque
Ne dicam ſtolidè.

For *Horace* himſelf was cautious to obtrude a new word upon his Readers, and makes cuſtom and common uſe the beſt meaſure of receiving it into our writings.

Multa renaſcentur quæ nunc cecidere, cadentq;
Quæ nunc ſunt in honore vocabula, ſi volet uſus,
Quem penes, arbitrium eſt, & jus, & norma loquendi.

The not obſerving this Rule is that which the world has blam'd in our Satyriſt *Cleveland*; to expreſs a thing hard and unnaturally, is his new way of Elocution: 'Tis true, no Poet but may ſometimes uſe a *Catachreſis*; *Virgil* does it;

Miſtaque ridenti Colocaſia fundet Acantho.

In his Eclogue of *Pollio*, and in his 7th *Æneid*.

—*Mirantur & undæ,*
Miratur nemus, inſuetum fulgentia longe,
Scuta virum fluvio, pictaſq; innare carinas.

Si

And *Ovid* once ſo modeſtly, that he askes leave to do it;

Si verbo audacia detur
Haud metuam ſummi dixiſſe Palatia cœli.

Calling the Court of *Jupiter* by the name of *Auguſtus* his Pallace, though in another place he is more bold, where he ſayes, *Et longas viſent Capitolia pompas.* But to do this alwayes, and never be able to write a line without it, though it may be admir'd by ſome few Pedants, will not paſs upon thoſe who know that wit is beſt convey'd to us in the moſt eaſie language; and is moſt to be admir'd when a great thought comes dreſt in words ſo commonly receiv'd that it is underſtood by the meaneſt apprehenſions, as the beſt meat is the moſt eaſily digeſted: but we cannot read a verſe of *Cleveland's* without making a face at it, as if every word were a Pill to ſwallow: he gives us many times a hard Nut to break our Teeth, without a Kernel for our pains. So that there is this difference betwixt his *Satyres* and Doctor *Donns*, That the one gives us deep thoughts in common language, though rough cadence; the other gives us common thoughts in abſtruſe words: 'tis true, in ſome places his wit is independent of his words, as in that of the Rebel *Scot*:

Had Cain been Scot God would have chang'd his doom;
Not forc'd him wander, but confin'd him home.

Si ſic, omnia dixiſſet! This is wit in all languages: 'tis like Mercury, never to be loſt or kill'd; and ſo that other;

For Beauty like White-powder makes no noiſe,
And yet the ſilent Hypocrite deſtroyes.

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You see the last line is highly Metaphorical, but it is so soft and gentle, that it does not shock us as we read it.

But, to return from whence I have digress'd, to the consideration of the Ancients Writing and their Wit, (of which by this time you will grant us in some measure to be fit judges,) Though I see many excellent thoughts in *Seneca*, yet he, of them who had a Genius most proper for the Stage, was *Ovid*; he had a way of writing so fit to stir up a pleasing admiration and concernment, which are the objects of a Tragedy, and to show the various movements of a Soul combating betwixt two different Passions, that, had he live'd in our age, or in his own could have writ with our advantages, no man but must have yielded to him; and therefore I am confident the *Medea* is none of his: for, though I esteem it for the gravity and sentiousness of it, which he himself concludes to be suitable to a Tragedy, *Omne genus scripti gravitate Tragœdia vincit*, yet it moves not my soul enough to judge that he, who in the Epique way wrote things so near the *Drama*, as the Story of *Myrrha*, of *Cannus* and *Biblis*, and the rest, should stir up no more concernment where he most endeavour'd it. The Master-piece of *Seneca* I hold to be that Scene in the *Troades*, where *Ulysses* is seeking for *Astyanax* to kill him; There you see the tenderness of a Mother, so represented in Andromache, that it raises compassion to a high degree in the Reader, and bears the neerest resemblance of any thing in their Tragedies to the excellent Scenes of Passion in *Shakespeare*, or in *Fletcher*: for Love-Scenes you will find few among them, their Tragique Poets dealt not with that soft passion, but with Lust, Cruelty, Revenge, Ambition, and those bloody actions they produc'd; which were more capable of raising horrour then compassion in an audience: leaving Love untoucht, whose gentleness would have temper'd them, which is the most frequent of all the passions, and which being the private concernment of every person, is sooth'd

sooth'd by viewing its own image in a publick entertainment.

Among their Comedies, we find a Scene or two of tenderness, and that where you would least expect it, in *Plautus*; but to speak generally, their Lovers say little, when they see each other, but *anima mea, vita mea*; ζωη και ψυχη, as the women in *Juvenal*'s time us'd to cry out in the fury of their kindness: then indeed to speak sense were an offence. Any sudden gust of passion (as an extasie of love in an unexpected meeting) cannot better be expres'd than in a word and a sigh, breaking one another. Nature is dumb on such occasions, and to make her speak, would be to represent her unlike her self. But there are a thousand other concernments of Lovers, as jealousies, complaints, contrivances and the like, where not to open their minds at large to each other, were to be wanting to their own love, and to the expectation of the Audience, who watch the movements of their minds, as much as the changes of their fortunes. For the imaging of the first is properly the work of a Poet, the latter he borrows of the Historian.

Eugenius was proceeding in that part of his Discourse, when *Crites* interrupted him. I see, said he, *Eugenius* and I are never like to have this Question decided betwixt us; for he maintains the Moderns have acquir'd a new perfection in writing, I can onely grant they have alter'd the mode of it. *Homer* describ'd his Heroes men of great appetites, lovers of beef broild upon the coals, and good fellows; contrary to the practice of the French Romances, whose Heroes neither eat, nor drink, nor sleep, for love. *Virgil* makes *Æneas* a bold Avower of his own virtues,

Sum pius Æneas fama super æthera notus;

which in the civility of our Poets is the Character of a Fanfaron or Hector: for with us the Knight takes occasion to walk out, or sleep, to avoid the vanity of telling his own Story, which the trusty Squire is ever to perform for him. So in their Love Scenes, of

which *Eugenius* ſpoke laſt, the Ancients were more hearty, we more talkative: they writ love as it was then the mode to make it, and I will grant thus much to *Eugenius*, that perhaps one of their Poets, had he liv'd in our Age,

Si foret hoc noſtrum fato delapſus in ævum (as *Horace* ſays of *Lucilius*)

he had alter'd many things; not that they were not as natural before, but that he might accommodate himſelf to the Age he liv'd in: yet in the mean time we are not to conclude any thing raſhly againſt thoſe great men; but preſerve to them the dignity of Maſters, and give that honour to their memories, (*Quos libitina ſacravit*;) part of which we expect may be paid to us in future times.

This moderation of *Crites*, as it was pleaſing to all the company, ſo it put an end to that diſpute; which, *Eugenius*, who ſeem'd to have the better of the Argument, would urge no farther: but *Liſideius* after he had acknowledg'd himſelf of *Eugenius* his opinion concerning the Ancients; yet told him he had forborn, till his Diſcourſe were ended, to ask him why he prefer'd the Engliſh Plays above thoſe of other Nations? and whether we ought not to ſubmit our Stage to the exactneſs of our next Neighbours?

Though, ſaid *Eugenius*, I am at all times ready to defend the honour of my Countrey againſt the French, and to maintain, we are as well able to vanquiſh them with our Pens as our Anceſtors have been with their ſwords; yet, if you pleaſe, added he, looking upon *Neander*, I will commit this cauſe to my friend's management; his opinion of our Plays is the ſame with mine: and beſides, there is no reaſon, that *Crites* and I, who have now left the Stage, ſhould re-enter ſo ſuddenly upon it; which is againſt the Laws of Comedie.

If the Queſtion had been ſtated, replied *Lyſideius*, who had writ beſt, the French or Engliſh forty years ago, I ſhould have been of your opinion, and

and adjudg'd the honour to our own Nation; but ſince that time, (ſaid he, (turning towards *Neander*) we have been ſo long together bad Engliſhmen*, that we had not leiſure to be good Poets; *Beaumont Fletcher*, and *Johnſon* (who were onely capable of bringing us to that degree of perfection which we have) were juſt then leaving the world; as if in an Age of ſo much horror, wit and thoſe milder ſtudies of humanity, had no farther buſineſs among us. But the Muſes, who ever follow Peace, went to plant in another Countrey; it was then that the great Cardinal of *Richlieu* began to take them into his protection; and that, by his encouragement, *Corneil* and ſome other Frenchmen reform'd their Theatre, (which before was as much below ours as it now ſurpaſſes it and the reſt of *Europe*;) but becauſe *Crites*, in his Diſcourſe for the Ancients, has prevented me, by touching upon many Rules of the Stage, which the Moderns have borrow'd from them; I ſhall onely, in ſhort, demand of you, whether you are not convinc'd that of all Nations the French have beſt obſerv'd them? In the unity of time you find them ſo ſcrupu'ous, that it yet remains a diſpute among their Poets, whether the artificial day of twelve hours more or leſs, be not meant by *Ariſtotle*, rather than the natural one of twenty four; and conſequently whether all Plays ought not to be reduc'd into that compaſs? This I can teſtifie, that in all their *Drama*'s writ within theſe laſt 20 years and upwards, I have not obſerv'd any that have extended the time to thirty hours: in the unity of place they are full as ſcrupulous, for many of their Criticks limit it to that very ſpot of ground where the Play is ſuppos'd to begin; none of them exceed the compaſs of the ſame Town or City.

The unity of Action in all their Plays is yet more conſpicuous, for they do not burden them with under-plots, as the Engliſh do; which is the reaſon why many Scenes of our Tragi-comedies carry on a deſign that is no-

thing of kinne to the main Plot; and that we ſee two diſtinct webbs in a Play; like thoſe in ill wrought ſtuffs; and two actions, that is, two Plays carried on together, to the confounding of the Audience; who, before they are warm in their concernments for one part, are diverted to another; and by that means eſpouſe the intereſt of neither. From hence likewiſe it ariſes that the one half of our Actors are not known to the other. They keep their diſtances as if they were *Mountagues* and *Capulets*, and ſeldom begin an acquaintance till the laſt Scene of the Fifth Act, when they are all to meet upon the Stage. There is no Theatre in the world has any thing ſo abſurd as the Engliſh Tragi-comedie, 'tis a *Drama* of our own invention, and the faſhion of it is enough to proclaim it ſo; here a courſe of mirth, there another of ſadneſs and paſſion; a third of honour, and fourth a Duel: Thus in two hours and a half we run through all the fits of *Bedlam* The French affords you as much variety on the ſame day, but they do it not ſo unſeaſonably, or *mal a propos* as we: Our Poets preſent you the Play and the farce together; and our Stages ſtill retain ſomewhat of the Original civility of the Red-Bull;

Atque ursum & pugiles media inter carmina poſcunt.

The end of Tragedies or ſerious Playes, ſayes *Ariſtotle*, is to beget admiration, compaſſion, or concernment; but are not mirth and compaſſion things incompatible? and is it not evident that the Poet muſt of neceſſity deſtroy the former by intermingling of the latter? that is, he muſt ruine the ſole end and object of his Tragedy to introduce ſomewhat that is forced in, and is not of the body of it: Would you not think that Phyſician mad, who having preſcribed a Purge, ſhould immediatly order you to take reſtringents upon it?

But to leave our Playes, and return to theirs, I have noted one great advantage they have had in the Plotting of their Tragedies; that is, they

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are always grounded upon some known History: according to that of *Horace*, *Ex noto fictum carmen sequar*; and in that they have so imitated the Ancients that they have surpass'd them. For the Ancients, as was observ'd before, took for the foundation of their Playes some Poetical Fiction, such as under that consideration could move but little concernment in the Audience, because they already knew the event of it. But the French goes farther;

Atque ita mentitur; sic veris falsa remiscet,
Primo ne medium, medio ne discrepet imum.

He so interweaves Truth with probable Fiction, that he puts a pleasing Fallacy upon us; mends the intrigues of Fate, and dispenses with the severity of History, to reward that vertue which has been rendred to us there unfortunate. Sometimes the story has left the success so doubtful, that the Writer is free, by the priviledge of a Poet, to take that which of two or more relations will best suite with his design: As for example, the death of *Cyrus*, whom *Justin* and some others report to have perish'd in the *Scythian* war, but *Xenophon* affirms to have died in his bed of extream old age. Nay more, when the event is past dispute, even then we are willing to be deceiv'd, and the Poet, if he contrives it with appearance of truth, has all the audience of his Party; at least during the time his Play is acting: so naturally we are kind to vertue, when our own interest is not in question, that we take it up as the general concernment of Mankind. On the other side, if you consider the Historical Playes of *Shakespeare*, they are rather so many Chronicles of Kings, or the business many times of thirty or forty years, crampt into a representation of two hours and a half, which is not to imitate or paint Nature, but rather to draw her in miniature, to take her in little; to look upon her through the wrong end of a Perspective, and receive her Images not onely much less, but infinitely more imperfect then the life: this, instead of making a Play delightful, renders it ridiculous.

Quodcunque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi.

For the Spirit of man cannot be satisfied but with truth, or at least verisimility; and a Poem is to contain, if not τὰ ἔτυμα, yet ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, as one of the Greek Poets has express'd it.

Another thing in which the French differ from us and from the Spaniards, is, that they do not embarass, or cumber themselves with too much Plot: they sonely represent so much of a Story as will constitute one whole and great action sufficient for a Play; we, who undertake more, do but multiply adventures; which, not being produc'd from one another, as effects from causes, but barely following, constitute many actions in the Drama, and consequently make it many Playes.

But by pursuing close one argument, which is not cloy'd with many turns, the French have gain'd more liberty for verse, in which they write: they have leisure to dwell upon a subject which deserves it; and to represent the passions (which we have acknowledg'd to be the Poets work) without being hurried from one thing to another, as we are in the Playes of *Calderon*, which we have seen lately upon our Theaters, under the name of Spanish Plotts. I have taken notice but of one Tragedy of ours, whose Plot has that uniformity and unity of design in it which I have commended in the French, and that is *Rollo*, or rather, under the name of *Rollo*, The Story of *Bassianus* and *Geta* in *Herodian*, there indeed the Plot is neither large nor intricate, but just enough to fill the minds of the Audience, not to cloy them. Besides, you see it founded upon the truth of History, onely the time of the action is not reduceable to the strictness of the Rules; and you see in some places a little farce mingled, which is below the dignity of the other parts; and in this all our Poets are extreamly peccant, even *Ben. Johnson* himself in *Sejanus* and *Catiline* has given us this Oleo of a Play; this unnatural mixture of Comedy and Tragedy, which to me sounds just as ridicu-

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lously as the History of *David* with the merry humours of *Gillet*. In *Sejanus* you may take notice of the Scene betwixt *Livia* and the Physician, which is a pleasant Satyre upon the artificial helps of beauty: In *Catiline* you may see the Parliament of Women; the little envies of them to one another; and all that passes betwixt *Curio* and *Fulvia*: Scenes admirable in their kind, but of an ill mingle with the rest.

But I return again to the French Writers; who, as I have said, do not burden themselves too much with Plot, which has been reproached to them by an *ingenious person* of our Nation as a fault, for he says they commonly make but one person considerable in a Play; they dwell upon him, and his concernments, while the rest of the persons are onely subservient to set him off. If he intends this by it, that there is one person in the Play who is of greater dignity then the rest, he must tax not onely theirs, but those of the Ancients, and which he would be loth to do, the best of ours; for 'tis impossible but that one person must be more conspicuous in it then any other, and consequently the greatest share in the action must devolve on him. We see it so in the management of all affairs; even in the most equal Aristocracy, the ballance cannot be so justly poys'd, but some one will be superiour to the rest; either in parts, fortune, interest, or the consideration of some glorious exploit; which will reduce the greatest part of business into his hands.

But, if he would have us to imagine that in exalting of one character the rest of them are neglected, and that all of them have not some share or other in the action of the Play, I desire him to produce any of *Corneilles* Tragedies, wherein every person (like so many servants in a well govern'd Family) has not some employment, and who is not necessary to the carrying on of the Plot, or at least to your understanding it.

There are indeed some protatick persons in the Ancients, whom they

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make use of in their Playes, either to hear, or give the Relation: but the French avoid this with great address, making their narrations onely to, or by such who are some way interessed in the main design. And now I am speaking of Relations, I cannot take a fitter opportunity to add this in favour of the French, that they often use them with better judgment and more *a propos* then the English do. Not that I commend narrations in generall, but there are two sorts of them; one of those things which are antecedent to the Play, and are related to make the conduct of it more clear to us, but, 'tis a fault to choose such subjects for the Stage which will inforce us upon that Rock; because we see they are seldome listned to by the Audience, and that is many times the ruin of the Play: for, being once let pass without attention, the Audience can never recover themselves to understand the Plot; and indeed it is somewhat unreasonable that they should be put to so much trouble, as, that to comprehend what passes in their sight, they must have recourse to what was done, perhaps, ten or twenty years ago.

But there is another sort of Relations, that is, of things hapning in the Action of the Play, and supposed to be done behind the Scenes: and this is many times both convenient and beautiful: for, by it, the French avoid the tumult, which we are subject to in *England*, by representing Duells, Battells, and the like; which renders our Stage too like the Theaters, where they fight Prizes. For what is more ridiculous then to represent an Army with a Drum and five men behind it; all which, the Heroe of the other side is to drive in before him, or to see a Duel fought, and one slain with two or three thrusts of the foyles, which we know are so blunted, that we might give a man an hour to kill another in good earnest with them.

I have observ'd that in all our Tragedies, the Audience cannot forbear laugh-

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ing when the Actors are to die; 'tis the most Comick part of the whole Play. All *passions* may be lively represented on the Stage, if to the well-writing of them the Actor supplies a good commanded voice, and limbs that move easily, and without stiffness; but there are many *actions* which can never be imitated to a just height: dying especially is a thing which none but a Roman Gladiator could naturally perform upon the Stage when he did not imitate or represent; but naturally do it; and therefore it is better to omit the representation of it.

The words of a good Writer which describe it lively, will make a deeper impression of belief in us then all the Actor can perswade us to, when he seems to fall dead before us; as a Poet in the description of a beautiful Garden, or a Meadow, will please our imagination more then the place it self can please our sight. When we see death represented we are convinc'd it is but Fiction; but when we hear it related, our eyes (the strongest witnesses) are wanting, which might have undeceiv'd us; and we are all willing to favour the sleight when the Poet does not too grosly impose upon us. They therefore who imagine these relations would make no concernment in the Audience, are deceiv'd, by confounding them with the other, which are of things antecedent to the Play; those are made often in cold blood (as I may say) to the audience; but these are warm'd with our concernments, which are before awaken'd in the Play. What the Philosophers say of motion, that when it is once begun it continues of it self, and will do so to Eternity without some stop put to it, is clearly true on this occasion; the soul being already mov'd with the Characters and Fortunes of those imaginary persons, continues going of its own accord, and we are no more weary to hear what becomes of them when they are not on the Stage, then we are to listen to the news of an absent Mistress. But it is objected, That if one part of the Play may be related, then why not all? I answer, Some

parts of the action are more fit to be represented, some to be related. *Corneille* sayes judiciously, that the Poet is not oblig'd to expose to view all particular actions which conduce to the principal: he ought to select such of them to be seen which will appear with the greatest beauty, either by the magnificence of the show, or the vehemence of passions which they produce, or some other charm which they have in them, and let the rest arrive to the audience by narration. 'Tis a great mistake in us to believe the French present no part of the action upon the Stage: every alteration or crossing of a design, every new spring passion, and turn of it, is a part of the action, and much the noblest, except we conceive nothing to be action till they come to blows; as if the painting of the Heroes mind were not more properly the Poets work then the strength of his body. Nor does this any thing contradict the opinion of *Horace*, where he tells us,

Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus. —

For he sayes immediately after,

— Non tamen intus
Digna geri promes in scenam, Multaq; tolles
Ex oculis, quæ mox narret facundia præsens.

Among which many he recounts some.

Nec pueros coram populo Medea trucidet,
Aut in avem Progne mutetur, Cadmus in anguem, &c.

That is, those actions which by reason of their cruelty will cause aversion in us, or by reason of their impossibility unbelief, ought either wholly to be avoided by a Poet, or onely deliver'd by narration. To which, we may have leave to add such as to avoid tumult, (as was before hinted) or to reduce the plot into a more reasonable compass of time, or for defect of Beauty in them, are rather to be related then presented to the eye. Examples of all these kinds

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are frequent, not onely among all the Ancients, but in the best receiv'd of our English Poets. We find *Ben. Johnson* using them in his Magnetick Lady, where one comes out from Dinner, and relates the quarrels and disorders of it to save the undecent appearing of them on the Stage, and to abrevitte the story; and this in expresse imitation of *Terence*, who had done the same before him in his Eunuch, where *Pythias* makes the like relation of what had happen'd within at the Souldiers entertainment. The relations likewise of *Sejanus*'s death, and the prodigies before it are remarkable; the one of which was hid from sight to avoid the horrour and tumult of the representation; the other to shun the introducing of things impossible to be believ'd. In that excellent Play the King and no King, *Fletcher* goes yet further; for the whole unravelling of the Plot is done by narration in the fifth Act, after the manner of the Ancients; and it moves great concernment in the Audience, though it be onely a relation of what was done many years before the Play. I could multiply other instances, but these are sufficient to prove that there is no errour in choosing a subject which requires this sort of narrations; in the ill managing of them, there may.

But I find I have been too long in this discourse since the French have many other excellencies not common to us, as that you never see any of their Playes end with a conversion, or simple change of will, which is the ordinary way our Poets use to end theirs. It shows little art in the conclusion of a Dramatick Poem, when they who have hinder'd the felicity during the four Acts, desist from it in the fifth without some powerful cause to take them off; and though I deny not but such reasons may be found, yet it is a pitch that is cautiously to be trod, and the Poet is to be sure he convinces the Audience that the motive is strong enough. As for example, the conversion of the Usurer in the Scornful Lady, seems to me a little forc'd; for being an Usurer, which implies a lover of Money to the highest degree of

covetousness, (and such the Poet has represented him) the account he gives for the sudden change is, that he has been dup'd by the wilde young fellow, which in reason might render him more wary another time, and make him punish himself with harder fare and coarser cloaths to get it up again: but that he should look upon it as a judgment, and so repent, we may expect to hear of in a Sermon, but I should never indure it in a Play.

I pass by this; neither will I insist upon the care they take, that no person after his first entrance shall ever appear, but the business which brings him upon the Stage shall be evident: which, if observ'd, must needs render all the events in the Play more natural; for there you see the probability of every accident, in the cause that produc'd it; and that which appears chance in the Play, will seem so reasonable to you, that you will there find it almost necessary; so that in the exits of their Actors you have a clear account of their purpose and design in the next entrance: (though, if the Scene be well wrought, the event will commonly deceive you) for there is nothing so absurd, sayes *Corneille*, as for an Actor to leave the Stage, onely because he has no more to say.

I should now speak of the beauty of their Rhime, and the just reason I have to prefer that way of writing in Tragedies before ours in Blanck-verse; but because it is partly receiv'd by us, and therefore not altogether peculiar to them, I will say no more of it in relation to their Playes. For our own I doubt not but it will exceedingly beautifie them, and I can see but one reason why it should not generally obtain, that is, because our Poets write so ill in it. This indeed may prove a more prevailing argument then all others which are us'd to destroy it, and therefore I am onely troubled when great and judicious Poets, and those who are acknowledg'd such, have writ or spoke against it; as for others they are to be answer'd by that one sentence of an ancient Authour.

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Sed ut primo ad conſequendos eos quos priores ducimus accendimur, ita ubi aut præteriri, aut aquari eos poſſe deſperavimus, ſtudium cum ſpe ſenescit: quod, ſcilicet, aſſequi non poteſt, ſequi deſinit; præteritoq; eo in quo eminere non poſſumus, aliquid in quo nitamur conquirimus.

Liſideius concluded in this manner; and *Neander* after a little pauſe thus anſwer'd him.

I ſhall grant *Liſideius*, without much diſpute, a great part of what he has urg'd againſt us; for I acknowledg the French contrive their Plots more regularly, obſerve the Laws of Comedy, and decorum of the Stage (to ſpeak generally) with more exactneſs then the Engliſh. Farther I deny not but he has tax'd us juſtly in ſome irregularities of ours which he has mention'd; yet, after all, I am of opinion that neither our faults nor their virtues are conſiderable enough to place them above us.

For the lively imitation of Nature being in the definition of a Play, thoſe which beſt fulfil that law ought to be eſteem'd ſuperiour to the others. 'Tis true, thoſe beauties of the French-poeſie are ſuch as will raiſe perfection higher where it is, but are not ſufficient to give it where it is not: they are indeed the Beauties of a Statue, but not of a Man, becauſe not animated with the Soul of Poeſie, which is imitation of humour and paſſions: and this *Liſideius* himſelf, or any other, however byaſſed to their Party, cannot but acknowledg, if he will either compare the humours of our Comedies, or the Characters of our ſerious Playes with theirs. He that will look upon theirs which have been written till theſe laſt ten years or thereabouts, will find it an hard matter to pick out two or three paſſable humours amongſt them. *Corneille* himſelf, their Arch-Poet, what has he produc'd except *the Lier*, and you know how it was cry'd up in *France*; but when it came upon the Engliſh Stage, though well tranſlated, and that part of *Dorant* acted to ſo much advantage by Mr. *Hart*, as I am confident it never receiv'd

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in its own Country, the most favourable to it would not put in competition with many of *Fletchers* or *Ben. Johnsons*. In the rest of *Corneilles* Comedies you have little humour; he tells you himself his way is first to show two Lovers in good intelligence with each other; in the working up of the Play to embroyle them by some mistake, and in the latter end to clear it up.

But of late years *de Moliere*, the younger *Corneille*, *Quinault*, and some others, have been imitating of afar off the quick turns and graces of the English Stage. They have mix'd their serious Playes with mirth, like our Tragicomedies since the death of Cardinal *Richlieu*, which *Lisideius* and many others not observing, have commended that in them for a virtue which they themselves no longer practice. Most of their new Playes are like some of ours, deriv'd from the Spanish Novells. There is scarce one of them without a vail, and a trusty *Diego*, who drolls much after the rate of the *Adventures*. But their humours, if I may grace them with that name, are so thin sown that never above one of them comes up in any Play: I dare take upon me to find more variety of them in some one Play of *Ben. Johnsons* then in all theirs together: as he who has seen the Alchymist, the silent Woman, or *Bartholmew*-Fair, cannot but acknowledge with me.

I grant the French have performed what was possible on the ground-work of the Spanish Playes; what was pleasant before they have made regular; but there is not above one good Play to be writ upon all those Plots; they are too much alike to please often, which we need not the experience of our own Stage to justifie. As for their new way of mingling mirth with serious Plot I do not with *Lysideius* condemn the thing, though I cannot approve their manner of doing it: He tells us we cannot so speedily recollect our selves after a Scene of great passion and concernment as to pass to another of mirth and humour, and to enjoy it with any relish: but why should

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be imagine the ſoul of man more heavy then his Senſes? Does not the eye paſs from an unpleaſant object to a pleaſant in a much ſhorter time then is requir'd to this? and does not the unpleaſantneſs of the firſt commend the beauty of the latter? The old Rule of Logick might have convinc'd him, that contraries when plac'd near, ſet off each other. A continued gravity keeps the ſpirit too much bent; we muſt refreſh it ſometimes, as we bait upon a journey, that we may go on with greater eaſe. A Scene of mirth mix'd with Tragedy has the ſame effect upon us which our muſick has betwixt the Acts, and that we find a relief to us from the beſt Plots and language of the Stage, if the diſcourſes have been long. I muſt therefore have ſtronger arguments ere I am convinc'd, that compaſſion and mirth in the ſame ſubject deſtroy each other; and in the mean time cannot but conclude, to the honour of our Nation, that we have invented, increas'd and perfected a more pleaſant way of writing for the Stage then was ever known to the Ancients or Moderns of any Nation, which is Tragicomedie.

And this leads me to wonder why *Liſideius* and many others ſhould cry up the barrenneſs of the French Plots above the variety and copiouſneſs of the Engliſh. Their Plots are ſingle, they carry on one deſign which is puſh'd forward by all the Actors, every Scene in the Play contributing and moving towards it: Ours, beſides the main deſign, have under plots or by-concernments, of leſs conſiderable Perſons, and Intrigues, which are carried on with the motion of the main Plot: juſt as they ſay the Orb of the fix'd Stars, and thoſe of the Planets, though they have motions of their own, are whirl'd about by the motion of the *primum mobile*, in which they are contain'd: that ſimilitude expreſſes much of the Engliſh Stage: for if contrary motions may be found in Nature to agree; if a Planet can go Eaſt and Weſt at the ſame time, one way by virtue of his own motion, the other by the force of the firſt mover; it will not be difficult to imagine how the under

Plot,

Plot, which is onely different, not contrary to the great design, may naturally be conducted along with it.

Eugenius has already shown us, from the confession of the French Poets, that the Unity of Action is sufficiently preserv'd if all the imperfect actions of the Play are conducing to the main design: but when those petty intrigues of a Play are so ill order'd that they have no coherence with the other, I must grant *Lisideius* has reason to tax that want of due connexion; for Co-ordination in a Play is as dangerous and unnatural as in a State. In the mean time he must acknowledge our variety, if well order'd, will afford a greater pleasure to the audience.

As for his other argument, that by pursuing one single Theme they gain an advantage to express and work up the passions, I wish any example he could bring from them would make it good: for I confess their verses are to me the coldest I have ever read: Neither indeed is it possible for them, in the way they take, so to express passion, as that the effects of it should appear in the concernment of an Audience: their Speeches being so many declamations, which tire us with the length; so that instead of perswading us to grieve for their imaginary Heroes, we are concern'd for our own trouble, as we are in the tedious visits of bad company; we are in pain till they are gone. When the French Stage came to be reform'd by Cardinal *Richelieu*, those long Harangues were introduc'd, to comply with the gravity of a Churchman. Look upon the *Cinna* and the *Pompey*, they are not so properly to be called Playes, as long discourses of reason of State: and *Polieucte* in matters of Religion is as solemn as the long stops upon our Organs. Since that time it is grown into a custome, and their Actors speak by the Hour-glass, as our Parsons do; nay, they account it the grace of their parts: and think themselves disparag'd by the Poet, if they may not twice or thrice in a Play entertain the Audience with a Speech of an hundred or

two

two hundred lines. I deny not but this may sute well enough with the French; for as we, who are a more sullen people, come to be diverted at our Playes; they who are of an ayery and gay temper come thither to make themselves more serious: And this I conceive to be one reason why Comedy is more pleasing to us, and Tragedies to them. But to speak generally, it cannot be deny'd that short Speeches and Replies are more apt to move the passions, and beget concernment in us then the other: for it is unnatural for any one in a gust of passion to speak long together, or for another in the same condition, to suffer him, without interruption. Grief and Passion are like floods rais'd in little Brooks by a sudden rain; they are quickly up, and if the concernment be powr'd unexpectedly in upon us, it overflows us: But a long sober shower gives them leisure to run out as they came in, without troubling the ordinary current. As for Comedy, Repartee is one of its chiefest graces; the greatest pleasure of the Audience is a chase of wit kept up on both sides, and swiftly manag'd. And this our forefathers, if not we, have had in *Fletchers* Playes, to a much higher degree of perfection then the French Poets can arrive at.

There is another part of *Lisideius* his Discourse, in which he has rather excus'd our neighbours then commended them; that is, for aiming onely to make one person considerable in their Playes. 'Tis very true what he has urged, that one character in all Playes, even without the Poets care, will have advantage of all the others; and that the design of the whole *Drama* will chiefly depend on it. But this hinders not that there may be more shining characters in the Play: many persons of a second magnitude, nay, some so very near, so almost equal to the first, that greatness may be oppos'd to greatness, and all the persons be made considerable, not onely by their quality, but their action. 'Tis evident that the more the persons are, the greater will be the variety of the Plot. If then the parts are manag'd so

regularly that the beauty of the whole be kept intire, and that the variety become not a perplex'd and confus'd mass of accidents, you will find it infinitely pleasing to be led in a labyrinth of design, where you see some of your way before you, yet discern not the end till you arrive at it. And that all this is practicable, I can produce for examples many of our English Playes: as the Maids Tragedy, the Alchymist, the Silent Woman; I was going to have named the Fox, but that the unity of design seems not exactly observ'd in it; for there appears two actions in the Play; the first naturally ending with the fourth Act; the second forc'd from it in the fifth: which yet is the less to be condemn'd in him, because the disguise of *Volpone*, though it suited not with his character as a crafty or covetous person, agreed well enough with that of a voluptuary: and by it the Poet gain'd the end he aym'd at, the punishment of Vice, and the reward of Virtue, which that disguise produc'd. So that to judge equally of it, it was an excellent fifth Act, but not so naturally proceeding from the former.

But to leave this, and pass to the latter part of *Lisideius* his discourse, which concerns relations, I must acknowledge with him, that the French have reason when they hide that part of the action which would occasion too much tumult upon the Stage, and choose rather to have it made known by narration to the Audience. Farther I think it very convenient, for the reasons he has given, that all incredible actions were remov'd; but, whither custome has so insinuated it self into our Country-men, or nature has so form'd them to fierceness, I know not; but they will scarcely suffer combats & other objects of horrour to be taken from them. And indeed, the indecency of tumults is all which can be objected against fighting. For why may not our imagination as well suffer it self to be deluded with the probability of it, as with any other thing in the Play? For my part, I can with as great ease

perswade

perſwade my ſelf that the blowes which are ſtruck are given in good earneſt, as I can, that they who ſtrike them are Kings or Princes, or thoſe perſons which they repreſent. For objects of incredibility I would be ſatisfied from *Liſideius*, whether we have any ſo remov'd from all appearance of truth as are thoſe of *Corneilles Andromede*? A Play which has been frequented the moſt of any he has writ? If the *Perſeus*, or the Son of an Heathen God, the *Pegaſus* and the Monſter were not capable to choak a ſtrong belief, let him blame any repreſentation of ours hereafter. Thoſe indeed were objects of delight; yet the reaſon is the ſame as to the probability: for he makes it not a Ballet or Maſque, but a Play, which is to reſemble truth. But for death, that it ought not to be repreſented, I have beſides the Arguments alledg'd by *Liſideius*, the authority of *Ben. Johnſon*, who has foreborn it in his Tragedies; for both the death of *Sejanus* and *Catiline* are related: though in the latter I cannot but obſerve one irregularity of that great Poet: he has remov'd the Scene in the ſame Act, from *Rome* to *Catiline's* Army, and from thence again to *Rome*; and beſides, has allow'd a very inconſiderable time, after *Catilines* Speech, for the ſtriking of the battle, and the return of *Petreius*, who is to relate the event of it to the Senate: which I ſhould not animadvert upon him, who was otherwiſe a painful obſerver of *τὸ πρέπον*, or the decorum of the Stage, if he had not us'd extream ſeverity in his judgment upon the incomparable *Shakeſpeare* for the ſame fault. To conclude on this ſubject of Relations, if we are to be blam'd for ſhowing too much of the action, the French are as faulty for diſcovering too little of it: a mean betwixt both ſhould be obſerved by every judicious Writer, ſo as the audience may neither be left unſatisfied by not ſeeing what is beautiful, or ſhock'd by beholding what is either incredible or undecent. I hope I have already prov'd in this diſcourſe, that though we are not altogether ſo punctual as the French, in obſerving the

lawes of Comedy; yet our errours are so few, and little, and those things wherein we excel them so considerable, that we ought of right to be prefer'd before them. But what will *Lisideius* say if they themselves acknowledge they are too strictly ti'd up by those lawes, for breaking which he has blam'd the English? I will alledge *Corneille's* words, as I find them in the end of his Discourse of the three Unities; *Il est facile aux speculatifs d'estre severes, &c.* "'Tis easie for speculative persons to judge severely; but if "they would produce to publick view ten or twelve pieces of this nature, "they would perhaps give more latitude to the Rules then I have done, "when by experience they had known how much we are bound up and con-"strain'd by them, and how many beauties of the Stage they banish'd from "it. To illustrate a little what he has said, by their servile observations of the unities of time and place, and integrity of Scenes, they have brought upon themselves that dearth of Plot, and narrowness of Imagination, which may be observ'd in all their Playes. How many beautifull accidents might naturally happen in two or three dayes, which cannot arrive with any probability in the compass of 24 hours? There is time to be allowed also for maturity of design, which amongst great and prudent persons, such as are often represented in Tragedy, cannot, with any likelihood of truth, be brought to pass at so short a warning. Farther, by tying themselves strictly to the unity of place, and unbroken Scenes, they are forc'd many times to omit some beauties which cannot be shown where the Act began; but might, if the Scene were interrupted, and the Stage clear'd for the persons to enter in another place; and therefore the French Poets are often forc'd upon absurdities: for if the Act begins in a chamber all the persons in the Play must have some business or other to come thither, or else they are not to be shown that Act, and sometimes their characters are very unfitting to appear there; As, suppose it were the Kings Bed-chamber, yet the meanest man in the

Tragedy

Tragedy muſt come and diſpatch his buſineſs there rather then in the Lobby or Court-yard (which is fitter for him) for fear the Stage ſhould be clear'd, and the Scenes broken. Many times they fall by it into a greater inconvenience; for they keep their Scenes unbroken, and yet change the place; as in one of their neweſt Playes, where the Act begins in the Street. There a Gentleman is to meet his Friend; he ſees him with his man, coming out from his Fathers houſe; they talk together, and the firſt goes out: the ſecond, who is a Lover, has made an appointment with his Miſtreſs; ſhe appears at the window, and then we are to imagine the Scene lies under it. This Gentleman is call'd away, and leaves his ſervant with his Miſtreſs: preſently her Father is heard from within; the young Lady is affraid the Servingman ſhould be diſcover'd, and thruſts him in through a door which is ſuppos'd to be her Cloſet. After this, the Father enters to the Daughter, and now the Scene is in a Houſe: for he is ſeeking from one room to another for this poor *Philipin*, or French *Diego*, who is heard from within, drolling and breaking many a miſerable conceit upon his ſad condition. In this ridiculous manner the Play goes on, the Stage being never empty all the while: ſo that the Street, the Window, the two Houſes, and the Cloſet, are made to walk about, and the Perſons to ſtand ſtill. Now what I beſeech you is more eaſie than to write a regular French Play, or more difficult then to write an irregular Engliſh one, like thoſe of *Fletcher*, or of *Shakeſpeare*.

If they content themſelves as *Corneille* did, with ſome flat deſign, which, like an ill Riddle, is found out e're it be half propos'd; ſuch Plots we can make every way regular as eaſily as they: but when e're they endeavour ro riſe up to any quick turns and counterturns of Plot, as ſome of them have attempted, ſince *Corneilles* Playes have been leſs in vogue, you ſee they write as irregularly as we, though they cover it more ſpeciouſly. Hence

the

the reaſon is perſpicuous, why no French Playes, when tranſlated, have, or ever can ſucceed upon the Engliſh Stage. For, if you conſider the Plots, our own are fuller of variety, if the writing ours are more quick and fuller of ſpirit: and therefore 'tis a ſtrange miſtake in thoſe who decry the way of writing Playes in Verſe, as if the Engliſh therein imitated the French. We have borrow'd nothing from them; our Plots are weav'd in Engliſh Loomes: we endeavour therein to follow the variety and greatneſs of characters which are deriv'd to us from *Shakeſpeare* and *Fletcher*: the copiouſneſs and well-knitting of the intrigues we have from *Johnſon*, and for the Verſe it ſelf we have Engliſh Preſidents of elder date then any of *Corneilles*'s Playes: (not to name our old Comedies before *Shakeſpeare*, which were all writ in verſe of ſix feet, or *Alexandrin's*, ſuch as the French now uſe) I can ſhow in *Shakeſpeare*, many Scenes of rhyme together, and the like in *Ben. Johnſons* Tragedi s: In *Catiline* and *Sejanus* ſometimes thirty or forty lines; I mean beſides the Chorus, or the Monologues, which by the way, ſhow'd *Ben.* no enemy to this way of writing, eſpecially if you look upon his ſad Shepherd which goes ſometimes upon rhyme, ſometimes upon blanck Verſe, like an Horſe who eaſes himſelf upon Trot and Amble. You find him likewiſe commending *Fletcher's* Paſtoral of the Faithful Shepherdeſs; which is for the moſt part Rhyme, though not refin'd to that purity to which it hath ſince been brought: And theſe examples are enough to clear us from a ſervile imitation of the French.

But to return from whence I have digreſs'd, I dare boldly affirm theſe two things of the Engliſh *Drama*: Firſt, That we have many Playes of ours as regular as any of theirs; and which, beſides, have more variety of Plot and Characters: And ſecondly, that in moſt of the irregular Playes of *Shakeſpeare* or *Fletcher* (for *Ben. Johnſon's* are for the moſt part regular) there is a more maſculine fancy and gre ter ſpirit in all the writing, then there is in

any

any of the French. I could produce even in *Shakeſpeare's* and *Fletcher's* Works, ſome Playes which are almoſt exactly form'd; as the Merry Wives of *Windſor*, and the Scornful Lady: but becauſe (generally ſpeaking) *Shakeſpeare*, who writ firſt, did not perfectly obſerve the Laws of Comedy, and *Fletcher*, who came nearer to perfection, yet through careleſneſs made many faults; I will take the pattern of a perfect Play from *Ben. Johnſon*, who was a careful and learned obſerver of the Dramatique Lawes, and from all his Comedies I ſhall ſelect *The Silent Woman*; of which I will make a ſhort Examen, according to thoſe Rules which the French obſerve.

As *Neander* was beginning to examine the Silent Woman, *Eugenius*, looking earneſtly upon him; I beſeech you *Neander*, ſaid he, gratifie the company and me in particular ſo far, as before you ſpeak of the Play, to give us a Character of the Authour; and tell us franckly your opinion, whether you do not think all Writers, both French and Engliſh, ought to give place to him?

I fear, replied *Neander*, That in obeying your commands I ſhall draw a little envy upon my ſelf. Beſides, in performing them, it will be firſt neceſſary to ſpeak ſomewhat of *Shakeſpeare* and *Fletcher*, his Rivalls in Poeſie; and one of them, in my opinion, at leaſt his equal, perhaps his ſuperiour.

To begin then with *Shakeſpeare*; he was the man who of all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets, had the largeſt and moſt comprehenſive ſoul. All the Images of Nature were ſtill preſent to him, and he drew them not laboriouſly, but luckily: when he deſcribes any thing, you more than ſee it, you feel it too. Thoſe who accuſe him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learn'd; he needed not the ſpectacles of Books to read Nature; he look'd inwards, and found her there. I cannot ſay he is every where alike; were he ſo, I ſhould do him

injury;

injury to compare him with the greateſt of Mankind. He is many times flat, inſipid; his Comick wit degenerating into clenches, his ſerious ſwelling into Bombaſt. But he is alwayes great, when ſome great occaſion is preſented to him: no man can ſay he ever had a fit ſubject for his wit, and did not then raiſe himſelf as high above the reſt of Poets,

Quantum lenta ſolent inter viburna cupreſſi.

The conſideration of this made Mr. *Hales* of *Eaton* ſay, That there was no ſubject of which any Poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better treated of in *Shakeſpeare*; and however others are now generally prefer'd before him, yet the Age wherein he liv'd, which had contemporaries with him, *Fletcher* and *Johnſon* never equall'd them to him in their eſteem: And in the laſt Kings Court, when *Ben*'s reputation was at higheſt, Sir *John Suckling*, and with him the greater part of the Courtiers, ſet our *Shakeſpeare* far above him.

Beaumont and *Fletcher* of whom I am next to ſpeak, had with the advantage of *Shakeſpeare*'s wit, which was their precedent, great natural gifts, improv'd by ſtudy. *Beaumont* eſpecially being ſo accurate a judge of Plays, that *Ben. Johnſon* while he liv'd, ſubmitted all his Writings to his Cenſure, and 'tis thought, us'd his judgement in correcting, if not contriving all his Plots. What value he had for him, appears by the Verſes he writ to him; and therefore I need ſpeak no farther of it. The firſt Play which brought *Fletcher* and him in eſteem was their *Philaſter*: for before that, they had written two or three very unſucceſsfully: as the like is reported of *Ben. Johnſon*, before he writ *Every Man in his Humour*. Their Plots were generally more regular then *Shakeſpeare*'s, eſpecially thoſe which were made before *Beaumont*'s death; and they underſtood and imitated the converſation of Gentlemen much better; whoſe wilde debaucheries, and quickneſs of wit in reparties, no Poet can ever paint as they have done. This Humour

mour of which *Ben. Johnſon* deriv'd from particular perſons, they made it not their buſineſs to deſcribe: they repreſented all the paſſions very lively, but above all, Love. I am apt to believe the Engliſh Language in them arriv'd to its higheſt perfection; what words have ſince been taken in, are rather ſuperfluous then neceſſary. Their Playes are now the moſt pleaſant and frequent entertainments of the Stage; two of theirs being acted through the year for one of *Shakeſpeare's* or *Johnſons*: the reaſon is, becauſe there is a certain gayety in their Comedies, and Pathos in their more ſerious Playes, which ſuits generally with all mens humours. *Shakeſpeares* language is likewiſe a little obſolete, and *Ben. Johnſon's* wit comes ſhort of theirs.

As for *Johnſon*, to whoſe Character I am now arriv'd, if we look upon him while he was himſelf, (for his laſt Playes were but his dotages) I think him the moſt learned and judicious Writer which any Theater ever had. He was a moſt ſevere Judge of himſelf as well as others. One cannot ſay he wanted wit, but rather that he was frugal of it. In his works you find little to retrench or alter. Wit and Language, and Humour alſo in ſome meaſure we had before him; but ſomething of Art was wanting to the *Drama* till he came. He manag'd his ſtrength to more advantage then any who preceded him. You ſeldome find him making Love in any of his Scenes, or endeavouring to move the Paſſions; his genius was too ſullen and ſaturnine to do it gracefully, eſpecially when he knew he came after thoſe who had performed both to ſuch an height. Humour was his proper Sphere, and in that he delighted moſt to repreſent Mechanick people. He was deeply converſant in the Ancients, both Greek and Latine, and he borrow'd boldly from them: there is ſcarce a Poet or Hiſtorian among the Roman Authours of thoſe times whom he has not tranſlated in *Sejanus* and *Catiline*. But he has done his Robberies ſo openly, that one may ſee he fears not to be taxed by any Law. He invades Authours like a Monarch, and

what would be theft in other Poets, is onely victory in him. With the ſpoils of theſe Writers he ſo repreſents old *Rome* to us, in its Rites, Ceremonies and Cuſtoms, that if one of their Poets had written either of his Tragedies, we had ſeen leſs of it then in him. If there was any fault in his Language, 'twas that he weav'd it too cloſely and laboriouſly in his ſerious Playes: perhaps too, he did a little to much Romanize our Tongue, leaving the words which he tranſlated almoſt as much Latine as he found them: wherein though he learnedly followed the Idiom of their language, he did not enough comply with ours. If I would compare him with *Shakeſpeare*, I muſt acknowledge him the more correct Poet, but *Shakeſpeare* the greater wit. *Shakeſpeare* was the *Homer*, or Father of our Dramatick Poets; *Johnſon* was the *Virgil*, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love *Shakeſpeare*. To conclude of him, as he has given us the moſt correct Playes, ſo in the precepts which he has laid down in his Diſcoveries, we have as many and profitable Rules for perfecting the Stage as any wherewith the French can furniſh us.

Having thus ſpoken of the Authour, I proceed to the examination of his Comedy, *The Silent Woman*.

Examen of the Silent Woman.

To begin firſt with the length of the Action, it is ſo far from exceeding the compaſs of a Natural day, that it takes not up an Artificial one. 'Tis all included in the limits of three hours and an half, which is no more than is requir'd for the preſentment on the Stage. A beauty perhaps not much obſerv'd; if it had, we ſhould not have look'd upon the Spaniſh Tranſlation of five hours with ſo much wonder. The Scene of it is laid in *London*; the latitude of place is almoſt as little as you can imagine: for it lies all within

within the compaſs of two Houſes, and after the firſt Act, in one. The continuity of Scenes is obſerv'd more than in any of our Playes, excepting his own Fox and Alchymiſt. They are not broken above twice or thrice at moſt in the whole Comedy, and in the two beſt of *Corneille's* Playes, the *Cid* and *Cinna*, they are interrupted once apiece. The action of the Play is intirely one; the end or aim of which is the ſetling *Moroſe's* Eſtate on *Dauphine*. The Intrigue of it is the greateſt and moſt noble of any pure unmix'd Comedy in any Language: you ſee in it many perſons of various characters and humours, and all delightful: As firſt, *Moroſe*, or an old Man, to whom all noiſe but his own talking is offenſive. Some who would be thought Criticks, ſay this humour of his is forc'd: but to remove that objection, we may conſider him firſt to be naturally of a delicate hearing, as many are to whom all ſharp ſounds are unpleaſant; and ſecondly, we may attribute much of it to the peeviſhneſs of his Age, or the wayward authority of an old man in his own houſe, where he may make himſelf obeyed; and this the Poet ſeems to allude to in his name *Moroſe*. Beſides this, I am aſſur'd from diverſe perſons, that *Ben. Johnſon* was actually acquainted with ſuch a man, one altogether as ridiculous as he is here repreſented. Others ſay it is not enough to find one man of ſuch an humour; it muſt be common to more, and the more common the more natural. To prove this, they inſtance in the beſt of Comical Characters, *Falſtaffe*: There are many men reſembling him; Old, Fat, Merry, Cowardly, Drunken, Amorous, Vain, and Lying: But to convince theſe people, I need but tell them, that humour is the ridiculous extravagance of converſation, wherein one man differs from all others. If then it be common, or communicated to many, how differs it from other mens? or what indeed cauſes it to be ridiculous ſo much as the ſingularity of it? As for *Falſtaffe*, he is not properly one humour, but a Miſcellany of Humours or Images, drawn from ſo many ſeveral men; that

wherein he is ſingular in his wit, or thoſe things he ſayes, *prater expectatum*, unexpected by the Audience; his quick evaſions when you imagine him ſurpriz'd, which as they are extreamly diverting of themſelves, ſo receive a great addition from his perſon; for the very ſight of ſuch an unwieldy old debauch'd fellow is a Comedy alone. And here having a place ſo proper for it I cannot but enlarge ſomewhat upon this ſubject of humour into which I am fallen. The Ancients had little of it in their Comedies; for the τὸ γελοῖον, of the old Comedy, of which *Ariſtophanes* was chief, was not ſo much to imitate a man, as to make the people laugh at ſome odd conceit, which had commonly ſomewhat of unnatural or obſcene in it. Thus when you ſee *Socrates* brought upon the Stage, you are not to imagine him made ridiculous by the imitation of his actions, but rather by making him perform ſomething very unlike himſelf: ſomething ſo childiſh and abſurd, as by comparing it with the gravity of the true *Socrates*, makes a ridiculous object for the Spectators. In their new Comedy which ſucceeded, the Poets ſought indeed to expreſs the ἦθος, as in their Tragedies the πάθος of Mankind. But this ἦθος contain'd onely the general Characters of men and manners; as old men, Lovers, Servingmen, Courtizans, Paraſites, and ſuch other perſons as we ſee in their Comedies; all which they made alike: that is, one old man or Father; one Lover, one Courtizan ſo like another, as if the firſt of them had begot the reſt of every ſort: *Ex homine hunc natum dicas.* The ſame cuſtome they obſerv'd likewiſe in their Tragedies. As for the *French*, though they have the word *humeur* among them, yet they have ſmall uſe of it in their Comedies, or Farces; they being but ill imitations of the *ridiculum*, or that which ſtirr'd up laughter in the old Comedy. But among the *Engliſh* 'tis otherwiſe: where by humour is meant ſome extravagant habit, paſſion, or affection; particular (as I ſaid before) to ſome one perſon: by the oddneſs of which, he is immediately diſtinguiſh'd from

from the reſt of men; which being lively and naturally repreſented, moſt frequently begets that malicious pleaſure in the Audience which is teſtified by laughter: as all things which are deviations from common cuſtomes are ever the apteſt to produce it: though by the way this laughter is onely accidental, as the perſon repreſented is Fantaſtick or Bizarre, but pleaſure is eſſential to it, as the imitation of what is natural. The deſcription of theſe humours, drawn from the knowledge and obſervation of particular perſons, was the peculiar genius and talent of *Ben. Johnſon*; To whoſe Play I now return.

Beſides *Moroſe*, there are at leaſt 9 or 10 different Characters and humours in the the *Silent Woman*, all which perſons have ſeveral concernments of their own, yet are all us'd by the Poet, to the conducting of the main deſign to perfection. I ſhall not waſte time in commending the writing of this Play, but I will give you my opinion, that there is more wit and acuteneſs of Fancy in it then in any of *Ben. Johnſon's*. Beſides, that he has here deſcrib'd the converſation of Gentlemen in the perſons of *True-Wit*, and his Friends, with more gayety, ayre and freedom, then in the reſt of his Comedies. For the contrivance of the Plot 'tis extream elaborate, and yet withal eaſie; for the *Nœud*, or untying of it, 'tis ſo admirable, that when it is done, no one of the Audience would think the Poet could have miſs'd it; and yet it was conceald ſo much before the laſt Scene, that any other way would ſooner have enter'd into your thoughts. But I dare not take upon me to commend the Fabrick of it, becauſe it is altogether ſo full of Art, that I muſt unravel every Scene in it to commend it as I ought. And this excellent contrivance is ſtill the more to be admir'd, becauſe 'tis Comedy where the perſons are onely of common rank, and their buſineſs private, not elevated by paſſions or high concernments as in ſerious Playes. Here every one is a proper Judge of all he ſees; nothing is repreſented but that with

with which he daily converſes: ſo that by conſequence all faults lie open to diſcovery, and few are pardonable. 'Tis this which *Horace* has judiciouſly obſerv'd:

Creditur ex medio quia res arceſſit habere
Sudoris minimum, ſed habet Comedia tanto
Plus oneris, quanto veniæ minus.——

But our Poet, who was not ignorant of theſe difficulties, had prevail'd himſelf of all advantages; as he who deſignes a large leap takes his riſe from the higheſt ground. One of theſe advantages is that which *Corneille* has laid down as the greateſt which can arrive to any Poem, and which he himſelf could never compaſs above thrice in all his Playes, *viz.* the making choice of ſome ſignal and long expected day, whereon the action of the Play is to depend. This day was that deſign'd by *Dauphine* for the ſetling of his Uncles Eſtate upon him; which to compaſs he contrives to marry him: that the marriage had been plotted by him long beforehand is made evident by what he tells *Truwit* in the ſecond Act, that in one moment he had deſtroy'd what he had been raiſing many months.

There is another artifice of the Poet, which I cannot here omit, becauſe by the frequent practice of it in his Comedies, he has left it to us almoſt as a Rule, that is, when he has any Character or humour wherein he would ſhow a *Coup de Maiſtre*, or his higheſt skill; he recommends it to your obſervation by a pleaſant deſcription of it before the perſon firſt appears. Thus, in *Bartholomew Fair* he gives you the Pictures of *Numps* and *Cokes*, and in this thoſe of *Daw*, *Laſoole*, *Moroſe*, and the *Collegiate Ladies*; all which you hear deſcrib'd before you ſee them. So that before they come upon the Stage you have a longing expectation of them, which prepares you

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to receive them favourably; and when they are there, even from their firſt appearance you are ſo far acquainted with them, that nothing of their humour is loſt to you.

I will obſerve yet one thing further of this admirable Plot; the buſineſs of it riſes in every Act. The ſecond is greater then the firſt, the third then the ſecond, and ſo forward to the fifth. There too you ſee, till the very laſt Scene, new difficulties arifing to obſtruct the action of the Play; and when the Audience is brought into deſpair that the buſineſs can naturally be effected, then, and not before, the diſcovery is made. But that the Poet might entertain you with more variety all this whille, he reſerves ſome new Characters to ſhow you, which he opens not till the ſecond and third Act. In the ſecond, *Moroſe, Daw*, the *Barber* and *Otter*; in the third the *Collegiat Ladies*: All which he moves afterwards in by-walks, or under-Plots, as diverſions to the main deſign, leaſt it ſhould grow tedious, though they are ſtill naturally joyn'd with it, and ſomewhere or other ſubſervient to it. Thus, like a skilful Cheſt-player, by little and little he draws out his men, and makes his pawns of uſe to his greater perſons.

If this Comedy, and ſome others of his, were tranſlated into French Proſe (which would now be no wonder to them, ſince *Moliere* has lately given them Playes out of Verſe which have not diſpleas'd them) I believe the controverſie would ſoon be decided betwixt the two Nations, even making them the Judges. But we need not call our Hero's to our ayde; Be it ſpoken to the honour of the Engliſh, our Nation can never want in any Age ſuch who are able to diſpute the Empire of Wit with any people in the Univerſe. And though the fury of a Civil War, and Power, for twenty years together, abandon'd to a barbarous race of men, Enemies of all good Learning, had buried the Muſes under the ruines of Monarchy; yet with the reſtoration of our happineſs, we ſee reviv'd Poeſie liſting up

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its head, & already ſhaking off the rubbiſh which lay ſo heavy on it. We have ſeen ſince His Majeſties return, many Dramatick Poems which yield not to thoſe of any forreign Nation, and which deſerve all Lawrels but the Engliſh. I will ſet aſide Flattery and Envy: it cannot be deny'd but we have had ſome little blemiſh either in the Plot or writing of all thoſe Playes which have been made within theſe ſeven years: (and perhaps there is no Nation in the world ſo quick to diſcern them, or ſo difficult to pardon them, as ours:) yet if we can perſwade our ſelves to uſe the candour of that Poet, who (though the moſt ſevere of Criticks) has left us this caution by which to moderate our cenſures;

——————————*Ubi plura nitent in carmine non ego paucis offendar maculis,*

If in conſideration of their many and great beauties, we can wink at ſome ſlight, and little imperfections; if we, I ſay, can be thus equal to our ſelves, I ask no favour from the French. And if I do not venture upon any particular judgment of our late Playes, 'tis out of the conſideration which an Ancient Writer gives me; *Vivorum, ut magna admiratio ita cenſura difficilis*: betwixt the extreams of admiration and malice, 'tis hard to judge uprightly of the living. Onely I think it may be permitted me to ſay, that as it is no leſſ'ning to us to yield to ſome Playes, and thoſe not many of our own Nation in the laſt Age, ſo can it be no addition to pronounce of our preſent Poets that they have far ſurpaſs'd all the Ancients, and the Modern Writers of other Countreys.

This, my Lord, was the ſubſtance of what was then ſpoke on that occaſion; and *Liſideius*, I think was going to reply, when he was prevented thus by *Crites*: I am confident, ſaid he, the moſt material things that can be ſaid, have been already urg'd on either ſide; if they have not, I muſt

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beg of *Liſideius* that he will defer his anſwer till another time: for I confeſs I have a joynt quarrel to you both, becauſe you have concluded, without any reaſon given for it, that Rhyme is proper for the Stage. I will not diſpute how ancient it hath been among us to write this way; perhaps our Anceſtours knew no better till *Shakeſpeare's* time. I will grant it was not altogether left by him, and that *Fletcher* and *Ben. Johnſon* us'd it frequently in their Paſtorals, and ſometimes in other Playes. Farther, I will not argue whether we receiv'd it originally from our own Countrymen, or from the French; for that is an inquiry of no little benefit, as theirs who in the midſt of the great Plague were not ſo ſollicitous to provide againſt it, as to know whether we had it from the malignity of our own air, or by tranſportation from *Holland*. I have therefore onely to affirm, that it is not allowable in ſerious Playes; for Comedies I find you already concluding with me. To prove this, I might ſatisfie my ſelf to tell you, how much in vain it is for you to ſtrive againſt the ſtream of the peoples inclination; the greateſt part of which are prepoſſeſs'd ſo much with thoſe excellent Playes of *Shakeſpeare*, *Fletcher*, and *Ben. Johnſon*, (which have been written out of Rhyme) that except you could bring them ſuch as were written better in it, and thoſe too by perſons of equal reputation with them, it will be impoſſible for you to gain your cauſe with them, who will ſtill be judges. This it is to which in fine all your reaſons muſt ſubmit. The unanimous conſent of an Audience is ſo powerful, That even *Julius Cæſar* (as *Macrobius* reports of him) when he was perpetual Dictator, was not able to ballance it on the other ſide. But when *Laberius*, a *Roman* Knight, at his requeſt contended in the *Mime* with another Poet, he was forc'd to cry out, *Etiam favente me victus es Liberi.* But I will not on this occaſion, take the advantage of the greater number, but onely urge ſuch reaſons againſt Rhyme, as I find in the Writings of thoſe who have argu'd for the other way. Firſt then I am

of opinion, that Rhyme is unnatural in a Play, becauſe Dialogue there is preſented as the effect of ſudden thought. For a Play is the imitation of Nature, and ſince no man, without premeditation ſpeaks in Rhyme, neither ought he to do it on the Stage; this hinders not but the Fancy may be there elevated to an higher pitch of thought then it is in ordinary diſcourſe: for there is a probability that men of excellent and quick parts may ſpeak noble things *ex tempore*: but thoſe thoughts are never fetter'd with the numbers or ſound of Verſe without ſtudy, and therefore it cannot be but unnatural to preſent the moſt free way of ſpeaking, in that which is the moſt conſtrain'd. For this Reaſon, ſayes *Ariſtotle*, 'Tis beſt to write Tragedy in that kind of Verſe which is the leaſt ſuch, or which is neareſt Proſe: and this amongſt the Ancients was the Iambique, and with us is blank verſe, or the meaſure of verſe, kept exactly without rhyme. Theſe numbers therefore are fitteſt for a Play; the others for a paper of Verſes, or a Poem. Blank verſe being as much below them as rhyme is improper for the *Drama*. And if it be objected that neither are blank verſes made *ex tempore*, yet as neareſt Nature, they are ſtill to be preferr'd. But there are two particular exceptions which many beſides my ſelf have had to verſe; by which it will appear yet more plainly, how improper it is in Playes. And the firſt of them is grounded upon that very reaſon for which ſome have commended Rhyme: they ſay the quickneſs of repartees in argumentative Scenes receives an ornament from verſe. Now what is more unreaſonable then to imagine that a man ſhould not onely light upon the Wit, but the Rhyme too upon the ſudden? This nicking of him who ſpoke before both in ſound and meaſure, is ſo great an happineſs, that you muſt at leaſt ſuppoſe the perſons of your Play to be born Poets, *Arcades omnes & cantare pares & reſpondere parati*: they muſt have arriv'd to the degree of *quicquid conabar dicere*: to make

make Verses almost whether they will or no: if they are any thing below this, it will look rather like the design of two then the answer of one: it will appear that your Actors hold intelligence together, that they perform their tricks like Fortune-tellers, by confederacy. The hand of Art will be too visible in it against that maxime of all Professions; *Ars est celare artem*, That it is the greatest perfection of Art to keep it self undiscover'd. Nor will it serve you to object, that however you manage it, 'tis still known to be a Play; and consequently the Dialogue of two persons understood to be the labour of one Poet. For a Play is still an imitation of Nature; we know we are to be deceiv'd, and we desire to be so; but no man ever was deceiv'd but with a probability of truth, for who will suffer a gross lie to be fasten'd on him? Thus we sufficiently understand that the Scenes which represent Cities and Countries to us, are not really such, but onely painted on boards and Canvas: But shall that excuse the ill Painture or designment of them; Nay rather ought they not to be labour'd with so much the more diligence and exactness to help the imagination? since the mind of man does naturally tend to, and seek after Truth; and therefore the nearer any thing comes to the imitation of it, the more it pleases.

Thus, you see, your Rhyme is uncapable of expressing the greatest thoughts naturally, and the lowest it cannot with any grace: for what is more unbefitting the Majesty of Verse, then to call a Servant, or bid a door be shut in Rhime? And yet this miserable necessity you are forc'd upon. But Verse, you say, circumscribes a quick and luxuriant fancy, which would extend it self too far on every subject, did not the labour which is requir'd to well turn'd and polish'd Rhyme, set bounds to it. Yet this Argument, if granted, would onely prove that we may write better in Verse, but not more naturally. Neither is it able to evince that; for he who wants judgment to confine his fancy in blank Verse, may want it

as much in Rhyme; and he who has it, will avoid errours in both kinds. Latine verse was as great a confinement to the imagination of those Poets, as Rhime to ours: and yet you find *Ovid* saying too much on every subject. *Nescivit* (sayes *Seneca*) *quando cessit relinquere*: of which he gives you one famous instance in his Discription of the Deluge.

Omnia ponteus erat, deerant quoque Littora Ponto.

Now all was Sea, Nor had that Sea a shore. Thus *Ovid's* fancy was not limited by verse, and *Virgil* needed not verse to have bounded his.

In our own language we see *Ben. Johnson* confining himself to what ought to be said, even in the liberty of blank Verse; and yet *Corneille*, the most judicious of the *French* Poets, is still varying the same sence an hundred wayes, and dwelling eternally upon the same subject, though confin'd by Rhyme. Some other exceptions I have to Verse, but being these I have nam'd are for the most part already publick, I conceive it reasonable they should first be answer'd.

It concerns me less then any, said *Neander*, (seeing he had ended) to reply to this Discourse; because when I should have prov'd that Verse may be natural in Playes, yet I should always be ready to confess, that those which I have written in this kind come short of that perfection which is requir'd. Yet since you are pleas'd I should undertake this Province, I will do it, though with all imaginable respect and deference both to that person from whom you have borrow'd your strongest Arguments, and to whose judgment when I have said all, I finally submit. But before I proceed to answer your objections, I must first remember you, that I exclude all Comedy from my defence; and next that I deny not but blank verse may be also us'd, and content my self onely to assert, that in serious Playes where the subject and characters are great, and the Plot unmix'd with mirth, which might allay or divert these concernments which

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are produc'd, Rhyme is there as natural, and more effectual then blank Verse.

And now having laid down this as a foundation, to begin with *Crites*, I must crave leave to tell him, that some of his Arguments against rhyme reach no farther then from the faults or defects of ill rhime, to conclude against the use of it in general. May not I conclude against blank verse by the same reason? If the words of some Poets who write in it, are either ill chosen, or ill placed (which makes not onely rhime, but all kind of verse in any language unnatural;) Shall I, for their vitious affectation condemn those excellent lines of *Fletcher*, which are written in that kind? Is there any thing in rhyme more constrain'd than this line in blank verse? I Heav'n invoke, and strong resistance make, where you see both the clauses are plac'd unnaturally; that is, contrary to the common way of speaking, and that without the excuse of a rhyme to cause it: yet you would think me very ridiculous, if I should accuse the stubbornness of blank Verse for this, and not rather the stifness of the Poet. Therefore, *Crites*, you must either prove that words, though well chosen, and duly plac'd, yet render not Rhyme natural in it self; or, that however natural and easie the rhyme may be, yet it is not proper for a Play. If you insist upon the former part, I would ask you what other conditions are requir'd to make Rhyme natural in it self, besides an election of apt words, and a right disposing of them? For the due choice of your words expresses your sence naturally, and the due placing them adapts the rhyme to it. If you object that one verse may be made for the sake of another, though both the words and rhyme be apt; I answer it cannot possibly so fall out; for either there is a dependance of sence betwixt the first line and the second, or there is none: if there be that connection, then in the natural position of the words, the latter line must of necessity flow from the former: if there be no dependance, yet still the due ordering of words

makes the last line as natural in it self as the other: so that the necessity of a rhime never forces any but bad or lazy Writers to say what they would not otherwise. 'Tis true, there is both care and Art requir'd to write in Verse; A good Poet never concludes upon the first line, till he has sought out such a rhime as may fit the sense, already prepar'd to heighten the second: many times the close of the sense falls into the middle of the next verse, or farther of, and he may often prevail himself of the same advantages in English which *Virgil* had in Latine. he may break off in the *Hemystich*, and begin another line: indeed, the not observing these two last things, makes Playes which are writ in verse so tedious: for though, most commonly, the sence is to be confin'd to the Couplet, yet nothing that does *perpetuo tenore fluere*, run in the same channel, can please alwayes. 'Tis like the murmuring of a stream, which not varying in the fall, causes at first attention, at last drowsiness. Variety of cadences is the best rule, the greatest help to the Actors, and refreshment to the Audience.

If then Verse may be made natural in it self, how becomes it improper to a Play? You say the Stage is the representation of Nature, and no man in ordinary conversation speaks in rhime. But you foresaw when you said this, that it might be answer'd; neither does any man speak in blank verse, or in measure without rhime. Therefore you concluded, that which is nearest Nature is still to be preferr'd. But you took no notice that rhime might be made as natural as blank verse, by the well placing of the words, *&c.* all the difference between them when they are both correct, is the sound in one, which the other wants; and if so, the sweetness of it, and all the advantage resulting from it, which are handled in the Preface to the *Rival Ladies*, will yet stand good. As for that place of *Aristotle*, where he sayes Playes should be writ in that kind of Verse which is neareſt Prose; it makes little for you, blank verse being properly but measur'd Prose. Now

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meaſure alone in any modern Language, does not conſtitute verſe; thoſe of the Ancients in Greek and Latine, conſiſted in quantity of words, and a determinate number of feet. But when, by the inundation of the *Goths* and *Vandals* into *Italy* new Languages were brought in, and barbarouſly mingled with the Latine (of which the *Italian*, *Spaniſh*, *French*, and ours, (made out of them and the *Teutonick*) are Dialects:) a new way of Poeſie was practis'd; new, I ſay in thoſe Countries, for in all probability it was that of the Conquerours in their own Nations. This new way conſiſted in meaſure or number of feet and rhyme. The ſweetneſs of Rhyme, and obſervation of Accent, ſupplying the place of quantity in words, which could neither exactly be obſerv'd by thoſe *Barbarians* who knew not the Rules of it, neither was it ſuitable to their tongues as it had been to the Greek and Latine. No man is tied in modern Poeſie to obſerve any farther rule in the feet of his verſe, but that they be diſſylables; whether *Spondee*, *Trochee*, or *Iambique*, it matters not; onely he is obliged to rhyme: Neither do the *Spaniſh*, *French*, *Italian* or *Germans* acknowledge at all, or very rarely any ſuch kind of Poeſie as blank verſe amongſt them. Therefore at moſt 'tis but a Poetick Proſe, *a Sermo pedeſtris*, and as ſuch moſt fit for Comedies, where I acknowledge Rhyme to be improper. Farther, as to that quotation of *Ariſtotle*, our Couplet Verſes may be rendred as near Proſe as blank verſe it ſelf, by uſing thoſe advantages I lately nam'd, as breaks in a Hemiſtick, or running the ſence into another line, thereby making Art and Order appear as looſe and free as Nature: or not tying our ſelves to Couplets ſtrictly, we may uſe the benefit of the Pindarique way, practis'd in the Siege of *Rhodes*; where the numbers vary and the rhyme is diſpos'd careleſly, and far from often chymeing. Neither is that other advantage of the Ancients to be deſpis'd, of changing the kind of verſe when they pleaſe with the change of the Scene, or ſome new entrance: for they con-

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fine not themselves always to Iambiques, but extend their liberty to all Lyrique numbers, and sometimes, even to Hexameter. But I need not go so far to prove that Rhyme, as it succeeds to all other offices of Greek and Latine Verse, so especially to this of Playes, since the custome of all Nations at this day confirms it: All the *French*, *Italian* and *Spanish* Tragedies are generally writ in it, and sure the Universal consent of the most civiliz'd parts of the world, ought in this, as it doth in other customs, include the rest.

But perhaps you may tell me I have propos'd such a way to make rhyme natural, and consequently proper to Playes, as is unpracticable, and that I shall scarce find six or eight lines together in any Play, where the words are so plac'd and chosen as is requir'd to make it natural. I answer, no Poet need constrain himself at all times to it. It is enough he makes it his general Rule; for I deny not but sometimes there may be a greatness in placing the words otherwise; and sometimes they may sound better, sometimes also the variety it self is excuse enough. But if, for the most part, the words be plac'd as they are in the negligence of Prose, it is sufficient to denominate the way practicable; for we esteem that to be such, which in the Tryal oftner succeeds then misses. And thus far you may find the practice made good in many Playes; where you do not, remember still, that if you cannot find six natural Rhymes together, it will be as hard for you to produce as many lines in blank Verse, even among the greatest of our Poets, against which I cannot make some reasonable exception.

And this, Sir, calls to my remembrance the beginning of your discourse, where you told us we should never find the Audience favourable to this kind of writing, till we could produce as good Playes in Rhyme, as *Ben. Johnson*, *Fletcher*, and *Shakespear*, had writ out of it. But it is to raise envy to the living, to compare them with the dead. They are honour'd, and almost ador'd by us, as they deserve; neither do I know any so presumptuous of themselves

themselves as to contend with them. Yet give me leave to say thus much, without injury to their Ashes, that not onely we shall never equal them, but they could never equal themselves, were they to rise and write again. We acknowledge them our Fathers in wit, but they have ruin'd their Estates themselves before they came to their childrens hands. There is scarce an Humour, a Character, or any kind of Plot, which they have not blown upon: all comes sullied or wasted to us: and were they to entertain this Age, they could not make so plenteous treatments out of such decay'd Fortunes. This therefore will be a good Argument to us either not to write at all, or to attempt some other way. There is no bayes to be expected in their Walks; *Tentanda via est quâ me quoque possum tollere humo.*

This way of writing in Verse, they have onely left free to us; our age is arriv'd to a perfection in it, which they never knew; and which (if we may guess by what of theirs we have seen in Verse (as the *Faithful Shepherdess*, and *Sad Shepherd*:) 'tis probable they never could have reach'd. For the Genius of every Age is different; and though ours excel in this, I deny not but that to imitate Nature in that perfection which they did in Prose, is a greater commendation then to write in verse exactly. As for what you have added, that the people are not generally inclin'd to like this way; if it were true, it would be no wonder, that betwixt the shaking off an old habit, and the introducing of a new, there should be difficulty. Do we not see them stick to *Hopkins* and *Sternholds* Psalmes, and forsake those of *David*, I mean *Sandys* his Translation of them? If by the people you understand the multitude, the οἱ πολλοὶ 'Tis no matter what they think; they are sometimes in the right, sometimes in the wrong; their judgment is a meer Lottery. *Est ubi plebs rectè putat, est ubi peccat.* *Horace* sayes it of the vulgar, judging Poesie. But if you mean the mix'd audience of the populace, and the Nobilesse, I dare confidently affirm that a great part of the latter

ſort are already favourable to verſe; and that no ſerious Playes written ſince the Kings return have been more kindly receiv'd by them, then the Seige of *Rhodes*, the *Muſtapha*, the *Indian* Queen, and *Indian* Emperour.

But I come now to the inference of your firſt Argument. You ſaid the Dialogue of Playes is preſented as the effect of ſudden thought, but no man ſpeaks ſuddenly, or *ex tempore* in Rhyme: And you inferr'd from thence, that Rhyme, which you acknowledge to be proper to Epique Poeſie cannot equally be proper to Dramatick, unleſs we could ſuppoſe all men born ſo much more then Poets, that verſes ſhould be made in them, not by them.

It has been formerly urg'd by you, and confeſs'd by me, that ſince no man ſpoke any kind of verſe *ex tempore*, that which was neareſt Nature was to be preferr'd. I anſwer you therefore, by diſtinguiſhing betwixt what is neareſt to the nature of Comedy, which is the imitation of common perſons and ordinary ſpeaking, and what is neareſt the nature of a ſerious Play: this laſt is indeed the repreſentation of Nature, but 'tis Nature wrought up to an higher pitch. The Plot, the Characters, the Wit, the Paſſions, the Deſcriptions, are all exalted above the level of common converſe, as high as the imagination of the Poet can carry them, with proportion to veriſimility. Tragedy we know is wont to image to us the minds and fortunes of noble perſons, and to portray theſe exactly, Heroick Rhime is neareſt Nature, as being the nobleſt kind of modern verſe.

Indignatur enim privatis, & prope ſocco.
Dignis carminibus narrari cœna Thyeſta. (Sayes *Horace.*)

And in another place,

Effutire leveis indigna tragœdia verſus.

Blank Verſe is acknowledg'd to be too low for a Poem, nay more, for a paper of verſes; but if too low for an ordinary Sonnet, how much more for Tragedy, which is by *Ariſtotle* in the diſpute betwixt the

Epique

Epique Poeſie and the Dramatick; for many reaſons he there alledges ranck'd above it.

But ſetting this defence aſide, your Argument is almoſt as ſtrong againſt the uſe of Rhyme in Poems as in Playes; for the Epique way is every where interlac'd with Dialogue, or diſcourſive Scenes; and therefore you muſt either grant Rhyme to be improper there, which is contrary to your aſſertion, or admit it into Playes by the ſame title which you have given it to Poems. For though Tragedy be juſtly preferr'd above the other, yet there is a great affinity between them as may eaſily be diſcover'd in that definition of a Play which *Liſideius* give us. The Genus of them is the ſame, a juſt and lively Image of humane nature, in its Actions, Paſſions, and traverſes of Fortune: ſo is the end, namely for the delight and benefit of Mankind. The Characters and Perſons are ſtill the ſame, *viz.* the greateſt of both ſorts, onely the manner of acquainting us with thoſe Actions, Paſſions and Fortunes is different. Tragedy performs it *viva voce*, or by action, in Dialogue, wherein it excels the Epique Poem which does it chiefly by narration, and therefore is not ſo lively an Image of Humane Nature. However, the agreement betwixt them is ſuch, that if Rhyme be proper for one, it muſt be for the other. Verſe 'tis true is not the effect of ſudden thought; but this hinders not that ſudden thought may be repreſented in verſe, ſince thoſe thoughts are ſuch as muſt be higher then Nature can raiſe them without premeditation, eſpecially to a continuance of them even out of verſe, and conſequently you cannot imagine them to have been ſudden either in the Poet, or the Actors. A Play, as I have ſaid to be like Nature, is to be ſet above it; as Statues which are plac'd on high are made greater then the life, that they may deſcend to the ſight in their juſt proportion.

Perhaps I have inſiſted too long upon this objection; but the clearing of it will make my ſtay ſhorter on the reſt. You tell us *Crites*, that rhyme

appears moſt unnatural in repartees, or ſhort replyes: when he who anſwers, (it being preſum'd he knew not what the other would ſay, yet) makes up that part of the verſe which was left incompleat, and ſupplies both the ſound and meaſure of it. This you ſay looks rather like the confederacy of two, then the anſwer of one.

This, I confeſs, is an objection which is in every ones mouth who loves not rhyme: but ſuppoſe, I beſeech you, the repartee were made onely in blank verſe, might not part of the ſame argument be turn'd againſt you? for the meaſure is as often ſupply'd there as it is in Rhyme. The latter half of the Hemyſtich as commonly made up, or a ſecond line ſubjoyn'd as a reply to the former; which any one leaf in *Johnſon's* Playes will ſufficiently clear to you. You will often find in the Greek Tragedians, and in *Seneca*, that when a Scene grows up into the warmth of repartees (which is the cloſe fighting of it) the latter part of the Trimeter is ſupply'd by him who anſwers; and yet it was never obſerv'd as a fault in them by any of the Ancient or Modern Criticks. The caſe is the ſame in our verſe as it was in theirs; Rhyme to us being in lieu of quantity to them. But if no latitude is to be allow'd a Poet, you take from him not onely his licenſe of *quidlibet audendi*, but you tie him up in a ſtraighter compaſs then you would a Philoſopher. This is indeed *Muſas colere ſeveriores*. You would have him follow Nature, but he muſt follow her on foot: you have diſmounted him from his *Pegaſus*. But you tell us this ſupplying the laſt half of a verſe, or adjoyning a whole ſecond to the former, looks more like the deſign of two then the anſwer of one. Suppoſe we acknowledge it: how comes this confederacy to be more diſpleaſing to you then in a Dance which is well contriv'd? You ſee there the united deſign of many perſons to make up one Figure: after they have ſeperated themſelves in many petty diviſions, they rejoyn one by one into a groſs: the confederacy is plain amongſt them;

for

ſoe chance could never produce any thing ſo beautiful, and yet there is nothing in it that ſhocks your ſight. I acknowledg the hand of Art appears in repartee, as of neceſſity it muſt in all kind of verſe. But there is alſo the quick and poynant brevity of it (which is an high imitation of Nature in thoſe ſudden guſts of paſſion) to ming'e with it: and this joyn'd with the cadency and ſweetneſs of the Rhyme, leaves nothing in the ſoul of the hearer to deſire. 'Tis an Art which appears; but it appears onely like the ſhadowings of Painture, which being to cauſe the rounding of it, cannot be abſent, but while that is conſider'd they are loſt: ſo while we attend to the other beauties of the matter, the care and labour of the Rhyme is carry'd from us, or at leaſt drown'd in its own ſweetneſs, as Bees are ſometimes bury'd in their Honey. When a Poet has found the repartee, the laſt perfection he can add to it, is to put it into verſe. However good the thought may be; however apt the words in which 'tis couch'd, yet he finds himſelf at a little unreſt while Rhyme is wanting: he cannot leave it till that comes naturally, and then is at eaſe, and ſits down contented.

From Replies, which are the moſt elevated thoughts of Verſe, you paſs to the moſt mean ones: thoſe which are common with the loweſt of houſhold converſation. In theſe, you ſay, the Majeſty of Verſe ſuffers. You inſtance in the calling of a ſervant, or commanding a door to be ſhut in rhyme. This, *Crites*, is a good obſervation of yours, but no argument: for it proves no more but that ſuch thoughts ſhould be wav'd, as often as may be, by the addreſs of the Poet. But ſuppoſe they are neceſſary in the places where he uſes them, yet there is no need to put them into rhime. He may place them in the beginning of a Verſe, and break it off, as unfit, when ſo debas'd for any other uſe: or granting the worſt, that they require more room then the Hemyſtich will allow; yet ſtill there is a choice to be made of the beſt words, and leaſt vulgar (provided they be apt) to expreſs ſuch

thoughts.

thoughts. Many have blam'd Rhyme in general, for this fault, when the Poet, with a little care, might have redreſs'd it. But they do it with no more juſtice, then if Engliſh Poeſie ſhould be made ridiculous for the ſake of the Water Poet's Rhymes. Our language is noble, full and ſignificant; and I know not why he who is Maſter of it may not cloath ordinary things in it as decently as the Latine; if he uſe the ſame diligence in his choice of words.

Delectus verborum Origo eſt Eloquentiæ.

It was the ſaying of *Julius Cæſar*, one ſo curious in his, that none of them can be chang'd but for a worſe. One would think unlock the door was a thing as vulgar as could be ſpoken; and yet *Seneca* could make it ſound high and lofty in his Latine.——

Reſerate cluſos Regii poſtes Laris.

But I turn from this exception, both becauſe it happens not above twice or thrice in any Play that thoſe vulgar thoughts are us'd; and then too (were there no other Apology to be made, yet) the neceſſity of them (which is alike in all kind of writing) may excuſe them. Beſides that the great eagerneſs and præcipitation with which they are ſpoken makes us rather mind the ſubſtance then the dreſs; that for which they are ſpoken, rather then what is ſpoke. For they are alwayes the effect of ſome haſty concernment, and ſomething of conſequence depends upon them.

Thus, *Crites*, I have endeavour'd to anſwer your objections; it remains onely that I ſhould vindicate an Argument for Verſe, which you have gone about to overthrow. It had formerly been ſaid, that the eaſineſs of blank verſe, renders the Poet too luxuriant; but that the labour of Rhyme bounds and circumſcribes an over-fruitful fancy, The ſence there being commonly confin'd to the couplet, and the words ſo order'd that the Rhyme naturally follows them, not they the Rhyme. To this you anſwer'd, that it was no Argument to the queſtion in hand, for the diſpute was not which way a man

may

may write beſt; but which is moſt proper for the ſubject on which he writes.

Firſt, give me leave, Sir, to remember you that the Argument againſt which you rais'd this objection, was onely ſecondary: it was built upon this *Hypotheſis*, that to write in verſe was proper for ſerious Playes. Which ſuppoſition being granted (as it was briefly made out in that diſcourſe, by ſhowing how verſe might be made natural) it aſſerted, that this way of writing was an help to the Poets judgment, by putting bounds to a wilde overflowing Fancy. I think therefore it will not be hard for me to make good what it was to prove: But you add, that were this let paſs, yet he who wants judgment in the liberty of his fancy, may as well ſhow the defect of it when he is confin'd to verſe: for he who has judgment will avoid errours, and he who has it not, will commit them in all kinds of writing.

This Argument, as you have taken it from a moſt acute perſon, ſo I confeſs it carries much weight in it. But by uſing the word Judgment here indefinitely, you ſeem to have put a fallacy upon us: I grant he who has Judgment, that is, ſo profound, ſo ſtrong, ſo infallible a judgment, that he needs no helps to keep it alwayes pois'd and upright, will commit no faults either in rhyme or out of it. And on the other extream, he who has a judgment ſo weak and craz'd that no helps can correct or amend it, ſhall write ſcurvily out of Rhyme, and worſe in it. But the firſt of theſe judgments is no where to be found, and the latter is not fit to write at all. To ſpeak therefore of judgment as it is in the beſt Poets; they who have the greateſt proportion of it, want other helps than from it within. As for example, you would be loth to ſay, that he who was indued with a ſound judgment had no need of Hiſtory, Geography, or Moral Philoſophy, to write correctly. Judgment is indeed the Maſter-workman in a Play: but he requires many ſubordinate hands, many tools to his aſſiſtance. And Verſe I affirm

to

to be one of these: 'Tis a Rule and line by which he keeps his building compact and even, which otherwise lawless imagination would raise either irregularly or loosly. At least if the Poet commits errours with this help, he would make greater and more without it: 'tis (in short) a slow and painfull, but the surest kind of working. *Ovid* whom you accuse for luxuriancy in Verse, had perhaps been farther guilty of it had he writ in Prose. And for your instance of *Ben. Johnson*, who you say, writ exactly without the help of Rhyme; you are to remember 'tis onely an aid to a luxuriant Fancy, which his was not: As he did not want imagination, so none ever said he had much to spare. Neither was verse then refin'd so much to be an help to that Age as it, to ours. Thus then the second thoughts being usually the best, as receiving the maturest digestion from judgment, and the last and most mature product of those thoughts being artful and labour'd verse, it may well be inferr'd, that verse is a great help to a luxuriant Fancy, and this is what that Argument which you oppos'd was to evince.

Neander was pursuing this Discourse so eagerly, that *Eugenius* had call'd to him twice or thrice ere he took notice that the Barge stood still, and that they were at the foot of *Somerset*-Stairs, where they had appointed it to land. The company were all sorry to seperate so soon, though a great part of the evening was already spent; and stood a while looking back upon the water, which the Moon-beams play'd upon, and made it appear like floating quick-silver: at last they went up through a crowd of French people who were merrily dancing in the open air, and nothing concern'd for the noise of Guns which had allarm'd the Town that afternoon. Walking thence together to the Piazza they parted there, *Eugenius* and *Lysideius* to some pleasant appointment they had made, and *Crites* and *Neander* to their several Lodgings.

FINIS.